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“Who do you say that I am?” Mark 8:28).

Jas 2:1-9; Mark 8:27-33

The scene at Caesarea Philippi where Jesus quizzes his disciples about who they think he is comes at the exact middle of Mark's Gospel. The question is central to the Gospel and to our own lives as disciples. Who we think Jesus is will determine the kind of commitment we make in following him. If we have yet to pose the question to ourselves, we are still at square one. If our Christian life feels vague and tentative, lacking in energy and purpose, this explains it. The adventure is still before us, waiting for our answer to the call we received when we were baptized.

The response of the Apostles can be a comfort to us, for they were clueless and still on a learning curve when Jesus posed the question. What Jesus wanted from the Apostles was an openness to what he was about to tell them. Peter, inspired and impulsive as always, blurted out that Jesus was the Messiah, God's anointed one. This was the right answer, but now it was time for them to know what kind of messiah he was. When they got to Jerusalem, all their dreams of power and glory would be shattered. There, where all prophets go to die, Jesus would be rejected

and killed.

They were stunned. Peter took Jesus aside to change his mind. For his temerity, Jesus called him “Satan,” adversary and tempter. As Jesus and his closest supporters were about to begin their descent toward Jerusalem, they still did not know who he was or how he was going to fulfill his mission to save the world. No one would understand the terrible paradox of Jesus’ death on the cross until after his resurrection, when Mark would write his Gospel. By then, most if not all of the Apostles would have already shared both the suffering and the glory Jesus had foretold. The mystery of salvation through self-sacrificing love would be the central mystery the church preached and witnessed to the world.

God loves beginners. If we are still trying to decide whether we are in or out, God is drawing us ever closer to the moment we surrender our hearts to the adventure that will make sense of our lives and give us the strength to say yes to both the suffering and the glory that will complete our baptismal identity. Jesus is again turning to his disciples to ask, “Who do you say that I am?”

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