



“The Names that Shape Us”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Mark 8:27-38

²⁷ Jesus and his followers went to the towns in the area of Caesarea Philippi. While they were traveling, Jesus asked the followers, “Who do people say I am?”

²⁸ They answered, “Some people say you are John the Baptizer. Others say you are Elijah. And others say you are one of the prophets.”

²⁹ Then Jesus asked, “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

³⁰ Jesus told the followers, “Don’t tell anyone who I am.”

³¹ Then Jesus began to teach his followers that the Son of Man must suffer many things. He taught that the Son of Man would not be accepted by the older Jewish leaders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the law. He said that the Son of Man must be killed and then rise from death after three days. ³² Jesus told them everything that would happen. He did not keep anything secret.

Peter took Jesus away from the other followers to talk to him alone. Peter criticized him for saying these things. ³³ But Jesus turned and looked at his followers. Then he criticized Peter. He said to Peter, “Get away from me, Satan! You don’t care about the same things God does. You care only about things that people think are important.”

³⁴ Then Jesus called the crowd and his followers to him. He said, “Any of you who want to be my follower must stop thinking about yourself and what you want. You must be willing to carry the cross that is given to you for following me. ³⁵ Any of you who try to save the life you have will lose it. But you who give up your life for me and for the Good News will save it. ³⁶ It is worth nothing for you to have the whole world if you yourself are lost. ³⁷ You could never pay enough to buy back your life. ³⁸ People today are so sinful. They have not been faithful to

God. As you live among them, don't be ashamed of me and my teaching. If that happens, I will be ashamed of you when I come with the glory of my Father and the holy angels."

Sermon:

Who do you say I am? Am I pastor, mother, grandmother? I am Andy, I am wife. I am friend. I am sister. I am grandmother. I am called and identified by these names. These are realities to me.

In one way or another, I try to live into them, live up to them, live fully as myself with these names. I accept them.

When someone asks you, "who are you?" do you ponder your answer? Do you name yourself as a business owner, or the son of someone held in high esteem? Are you the mother of that child, or the principle of that school?

The names we claim matter. The variety of names may be a real struggle...when I, 21, and still named "cute" and yet wanted to be named, "someone to take seriously" ...I had to push back against that name.

So I got to wondering; when Jesus was asking his friends, did he ask as an interrogation, in idle curiosity, or to set up a teaching moment?

What did Jesus think, when impulsive, loud, Peter declared him "Messiah"? Did he advise them to "tell no one" because in that time and place, being "Messiah" meant raising an army and he had no plan to raise one? Did Jesus realize that "Messiah" could easily mean a short walk to a Roman execution? That "Messiah" could well mean hysteria among the people, uprisings in the villages, fighting in the streets? That name would mean Roman vengeance against whole villages and towns...from the fighters, to the babies and the grandma's ... massacred by Roman legions?

Hard enough to be a prophet, either reviled or idolized.
Hard enough to follow in the shadow of John the Baptizer, with his fiery oratory, his wild eating and dressing habits, his reckless teaching and fierce condemnation.

But to be the “Messiah” of the Jewish people? How awful.
Especially when Jesus knew better.

Peter might take him aside and scold him because Peter thought he knew exactly what the name “Messiah” meant: powerful, ruler, dominion and glory.
That’s what everyone was thinking, hoping for, expecting.

And Jesus rebukes Peter. Because Jesus refuses to satisfy their understanding of that name, that name with all the baggage of centuries associated with it.
And instead, he offers the terrible teaching that makes no sense when linked to the name “Messiah”. Sacrifice, loss, a cross. Losing what you think you are entitled to, and gaining something different that you never expected.

It isn’t so difficult for us, 2,000 years later. After all, we know how the story ends in the gospels, and we know the stories of the early church and the worldwide church.

There is power and there is glory. And in many places there is dominion, and rulership over millions of followers.

And we, in our crazy variety, we all call ourselves “Christian”.
Often with pride. A name to honor.
Often as a way of knowing we belong. We are part of something big. We are powerful, too.

Jesus does not call himself “Messiah” nor does he call himself the founder of the “Christian religion”.

He does not call himself Messiah, but rather, Son of Man. As one professor of mine translated this phrase, Jesus ended up calling himself, “the New Human Being”.

Now how does that name strike you?

- The New Human Being would be unlike the rest of us, yet still one of us. Human Being, yet a new kind of one.
- The New Human Being would be reorienting our humanity, and still sharing in our humanity. Human Being, but in a new way.

- The New Human Being would be living in this world in a new way, challenging us to die to our old ways of thinking, fighting, hating and fearing.
- The New Human Being would want us to stop striving and dying for power, wealth, status, prestige. These things are not the things that give life. (vs.36)
- The New Human Being would be saying; Live the new and challenging possibility of a life wholly changed, oriented toward God's vision of peace with justice, of welcome without limits, grace and mercy greater than fear and judgment. Enough for all, want for no one. Joy in living, rather than joy in conquering. (vs. 35)

Yeah, Jesus, as the "Messiah" would be undermining, even ending the world that we know. The New Human Being would ask us to be willing to die to one world and live into a strange new world.

We Christians have yet to do it.

I am not going to say we don't try. There have been many experiments and many valiant ways in which we have tried, and still try.

But it is a scary world that would undermine this one - and so we would rather keep our religion small and private, or sold to the largest political entity, or swallowed up by a business model.

But on some level, good people, we are in the business of revolution, of transformation, of resurrection.

Jesus "told his friends everything" (vs 32)...the betrayal, the suffering, the cross and the RESURRECTION.

WHICH CHANGES EVERYTHING.

A world in which there is resurrection is the world of the New Human Being. It is a world of enormous love and hope. Of the possibilities of life transcending death, joy overcoming despair.

Utterly worth living for and utterly worth being unafraid of dying. Utterly different and new. Better, better, better. Better than our imagining...

The gospels of Jesus are full of stories that begin, "The Kingdom of God is like...and then they go on to say: a mustard seed, a farmers crop, a lost coin, a lost sheep, a prodigal son"...

There is no single image, no single name we can ever give that will be enough. No name will be able to adequately describe the world that the New Human Being calls us to, but there are a few words we can cling to, perhaps...

Realm of God.	Enough.
Home.	Peace.
Justice.	Joy.
Welcome.	Community.
Family.	Laughter.
Healing.	Celebration.
Restoration.	Recovery.
Life.	

I invite you to find the names of the New Human Being and the words of the Kingdom that bring you joy and hope.

Find the stories and the parables of the New Human Being that give you meaning and strengthen you with courage.

Then name yourself as one who will live this mighty challenge to our small and fearful world, that our gospel reading reminds us, is so full of “sinful people”. They are sinners, yes, people who are “missing the mark” in their lives. Who have not learned the beautiful names which they should claim. Names of welcome, names of joy, names of hope and names of healing and of justice. Names that the New Human Being spoke to all the world. And he speaks still. Through you and me.

So claim them, the names of beauty. The names of hope. The names of a new world, healed and joyful.

I invite you to claim the name “Christian” and restore it to a word of beauty and hope, of courage and justice and joy.

A name that the New Human Being would rejoice to hear on our lips and in our lives, as we seek to follow him.