

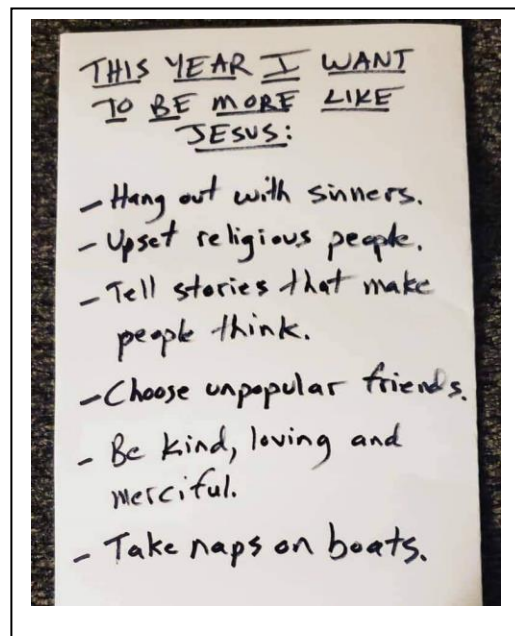
Sermon for August 23, 2020 by Pastor Hanberry "Who Do You Say That Jesus is for You? Tucc (Ser20-34)

The opening lines of our lesson from Romans 12 speak to what a "new life in Christ" looks like. Indeed, what is a "new life in Christ"? Is that only the time when you were confirmed or even baptized? Is anything new happening in your life? In your life with Christ? Can we even think about such a thing happening in our lives as we have matured into adulthood?

How does Paul describe "the new life in Christ"? He describes this new life this way: **12** *I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world,<sup>[c]</sup> but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.<sup>[d]</sup>*

The question this text raises for us is not new, really. In a way it's the same kind of question Jesus asks the disciples (and us) in the gospel lesson from chapter 16 in Matthew: "Who do you say that I am"? Who is Christ to you? How does Jesus inform and shape your life? What would your life look like if Jesus were truly at the core or heart of how you live? As with Paul, is there anything new taking place in your life? In these days, is anything new happening with your relationship with Jesus Christ? Or is it more like, "same old, same old stuff"?

One of my friends on Face Book posted this graphic the other day as a statement of how she would like to be this year. In many ways this is one person's answer to the question: How does Jesus shape and inform your life. She's saying: "I want to be more like Jesus." Moreover, "I want to live my life like Jesus lived his." Not only that, she is also saying, "I want to follow Jesus; I want my life to look like his life." If this friend of mine is really serious about who Jesus is for here, then by all means, she will "hang out with sinners, upset religious people, tell stories that make people think rather than sharing some of the normal stories that might be limited in their impact on another person's life of faith. She will have some unpopular friends but she will also be "kind, loving and merciful." I like the last item on the list the best: "take naps on boats." Sounds good to me. Jesus did that sometimes, or at least he tried to take naps and rest.



My FB friend is also answering the question Jesus poses to the disciples: Who do you say that I am? For her, Jesus is my friend's teacher and spiritual

guide. So, I ask you this morning, "who is Jesus for you"? I hope you'll stop reading this sermon for a moment. Maybe, get out a piece of paper and pencil and write down what you're thinking about who Jesus is for you. Spiritual guide? Spiritual friend? Savior? Role Model? Counselor or the one you think about when you're struggling with what you think about what's happening in the world these days?

Turn the sheet of paper over and on the other side create your own poster titled: "This year I want to be more like Jesus." What would you put on this list? You know any "sinners" you want to hang out with? How about your pastor, who might be one of those 'religious leaders' referred to in the poster my FB friend shared? I hope I am not like unto the Pharisees or Sadducees.

I would love to see your list of the ways you'd like to be like Jesus. More than that, I would love to see how you see Jesus fitting into the world in which we live in these days. Some would describe Jesus as "radical." This is a "loaded" word these days...almost toxic when we see what's happening on the streets of our nation. Even so, if we are really and truly honest, some might describe Jesus' life and teachings as radical. If nothing else, he "upset the religious leaders." In fact, it is safe to say that's exactly how and why he was killed on a cruel cross of crucifixion. He came to "do a new thing." I am not suggesting that following Jesus will get us into that much trouble, but in many ways in the world in which we live, following Jesus, living like him or "being more like Jesus" can invite others to wonder about us?

Let's go back to the text from Matthew and look at how the disciples, namely Peter, respond to Jesus' question. Peter says to Jesus, "You are the Messiah,<sup>[a]</sup> the Son of the living God." To Jesus, that is the right answer but not one he wants the disciples to tell others about at the time. That would really upset the religious leaders. It seems to me; Jesus preferred that people around him and the disciples would discover who he was by the way he lived and acted in the world and how the disciples lived their lives. "They will know we are Christians by our Love, by our Love" is the MO, the modus operandi, of Jesus. But also, the idea of his being "The Messiah," was a HUGE deal for the religious authorities of the day. The title of "Messiah," is not part of his MO, either. He is all about spreading love in the world and getting into trouble.

He is about spending time with sinners, upsetting the religious leaders, telling stories that made people think (and act), being kind and taking naps on boats. May this so for you and for me. Amen.