

Sermon: August 27, 2023

After 200 years, the people forgot about Joseph and his dreams and all the things his God could do. But God never forgot, and in a baby named Moses, new hope was born.

Thousands of years later, new hope was born again in another baby boy named Jesus. A baby who grew up to be a man of such promise... and so much mystery.

"Who do people say that I am?" Jesus asks the disciples. It's a good question. Ask anyone and they will give you a different answer. For 2000 years, wars have been fought and communities torn apart as people fight over who they think Jesus is and why Jesus came to us. So it's no wonder that people in Jesus' time were kind of confused and reached back to ancient prophets.

"Who do *You* say I am?" Jesus asked his closest friends. Because ultimately it is what our closest friends think of us that matters most.

Who do you say I am?

And the answer comes easily to Simon Peter: "You are the Messiah... the Christ... the Son of the Living God!"

This is an important moment. After seeing Jesus feed thousands of people; after joining Jesus on his walk on top of the water, Peter finally seems to get it. But does he? When Jesus proclaims Jesus as the long-awaited Christ, what does he really mean?

The people had waited for the Messiah – the Christ – for a long time. He would be a king, continuing the reign of David, the most powerful King in their history. He would enter the gates of Jerusalem with an army and would be greeted as a liberator. The Messiah was a revolutionary who would overthrow the Roman Empire, so that the people would be able to live the covenantal lives God had promised Abraham and Moses so many generations ago.

This is the Christ that Peter proclaims. He makes that clear in the verses that follow today's reading. When Jesus talks about the cross and his own destiny, Peter rebukes him: "Stop it, Jesus! These horrible things can NEVER happen to you!"

The truth of Jesus' ministry and Peter's dreams of power and glory do not connect at all.

Today Peter gets a glimpse of who Jesus really is, but he's not ready to embrace the whole truth. He cannot bear to hear Jesus talk about crucifixion, because in his mind crucifixion equals failure. He cannot comprehend the depth and width and height of God's grace found in Jesus – it will take a long time for the pieces to fall together – after denial... after fear... after an empty tomb.

Peter still has a long way to go.

But the point is not that Peter doesn't understand. Peter has seen an important glimpse into the Kingdom of God, and Jesus recognizes Peter's words as an important step in Peter's own journey towards the cross.

Jesus is ready to wait until Peter can take it all in. And Jesus waits for us too.

Earlier I told you about the ministry focus areas that have emerged through crossroads. There is some information we need from you as we move forward:

Understanding Your Context

- 1. How do you define your community (geographic location, etc.)?*
- 2. What is the impact you are hoping your congregation will have on your community (the geographic location or locations)?*
- 3. What is the transformation you are personally seeking for your church & community?*

We are called to hold onto faith!

Thousands of years before the idea of a Messiah even existed, the Hebrew midwives lived this kind of faith. They rejected the evil demands of the Pharaoh and quietly continued to do what God asked them to do – deliver babies. And one of those babies delivered would be the one to lead them all to freedom. Moses was born because these women lived their faith.

Generations later a small group of fishermen and sinners claimed that kind of faith for themselves, picking up their crosses to follow the one who saves us. Now it's time to see what God has in store for us today.