



The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island

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Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday of Pentecost

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The gospel for today presents us with the most important question that Jesus can ask, "Who do you say that I am?" And the disciples all have different opinions except for Peter. Peter looking at Jesus said, "You are the Messiah, "the Son of the living God."

And so we know the answer but it is like an umbrella. Because for each of us, the attributes that we call upon in times of need or trouble are attributes of Jesus that become personal to us. Attributes like the rock, The Son of the living God, the bread of heaven, light, way, you Jesus are the way, the truth and the life. Rock, rabbi, king, these are all names for Jesus which resonate with us at different times in our daily lives.

As we grow in our spiritual lives, we experience Jesus in different ways. There is not a right or wrong, but there is a convergence of our needs with Jesus' special gift to us.

A friend of mine was widowed a little over a year ago. She readily admits that she made a terrible mistake in selling their house and moving to Santa Fe, New Mexico where they had vacationed on many occasions. She went to the local church and she met a few people in the town and in the church, but it was March and the church closed, and the shops were closed, and she found herself at home knowing no one and very lonely. So lonely in fact, that even the word suicide came into her mind.

But she shared with me that Jesus became for her a companion in the midst of her loneliness. Jesus as companion. Who do you say that I am? For her, Jesus was companion and I have to confess, along with the TV and the many series and episodes that she watched, but she could still identify at a spiritual level with the one who she can now call a friend.

When I worked with the homeless many years ago, so many of them would tell me that the only hope they had was the hope of faith, their hope in Jesus Christ. So Jesus for them was

hope and companion on the way. In the midst of instability, Jesus is often seen as the rock. In the midst of confusion, Jesus has been the way.

Last week I helped a family prepare for the burial of their mother. They were immersed in grief. Since March, they lost mother, father and best friend. They were all elderly and it was not COVID-19 related. But the grief was enormous. No family to surround them. No closure, no party after the memorial or the burial offering a chance to gather together as family and friends in thanksgiving for the life of these important people. There was only grief.

The mother's daughter told me that what she found comforting at the time was realizing that Jesus wept. Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus. And so for her, Jesus was the weeper. Jesus the weeper, Jesus the mourner, Jesus the one who also grieved.

In our present time, many look to Jesus as their peace, their strength, their shelter from this terrible storm. But the question still remains, who is Jesus for you?

At different times and situations in life, Jesus comes to us in different ways. It is the same Jesus, but we relate to a particular set of His attributes. Yes, He is our Messiah, the one who saves, but at certain times, part of His nature speak most profoundly to where we are.

"Jesus is my strength," said a man who was active in AA. My higher power is God, but I need to tap into Jesus's strength as the strong arm who can spare me from my own weaknesses and temptations.

Today, Jesus may be your king, tomorrow you may see Jesus as your redeemer. Next week, perhaps He is the hope you need to move through an impossible situation. Or maybe in the midst of darkness, Jesus comes to you as light.

Who is Jesus for you? Not your grandmother's Jesus or your Sunday School teacher or who your priest thinks Jesus is. And when you can name Jesus for yourself, you discover what message He has for you.

Perhaps you see Him as your good shepherd because you feel lost and seek assurance and guidance. Perhaps you are experiencing waves of guilt. And through this, you become aware of Jesus as the one who forgives. When you know who Jesus is for you, and how He comes to you in the midst of your everyday life, you will become aware of how Jesus is molding you, forming you and making you available to others.

When I presided at the burial last Saturday, 11 members of the family gathered near the gravesite. The woman who had been comforted by Jesus the weeper was the person who

was a source of compassion to the other mourners. It was out of her experience with the weeping Jesus that she was able to be with those who wept at that gravesite.

When in our poverty, we have just discovered Jesus as the grace giver, we can be a source of grace to others. When we can name who Jesus is for us, we discover that we are growing in unity with Him. We are becoming one with Him and we can minister to others out of enormous compassion and love because we have discovered ourselves rooted in Jesus's compassion and mercy.

Share with one another who Jesus is for you. Ask the question around the dinner table or in a phone call. I know that God is working in you. And I know that God works through the church, the community of faith of which you are a part. And as you invite Jesus into your life day by day, you will continually discover who He is for you and I can assure you, slowly, over time, you will be conformed to His life and you will grow as His follower.

Your faith will deepen, and out of answering the question, you will be a bearer of His presence to others. And as we enter encounter Christ and allow ourselves to become His Word, the words we use to describe Him will slowly become the gifts that we offer to others, and which impact the communities and peoples with whom we live and move and have our being.

Who is Jesus for you? I believe that this is the most important question that we can answer at any time, but especially in this time of enormous social and political change. Our faith is being tested and our Christian response is so critical in addressing the extraordinary challenges of our time. See yourself amongst Jesus's followers. Hear the question asked to you and find a way to live into the answer, gracefully, fully, embrace the question and discover a newness and refreshment in your own life.

Who is Jesus for you?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.