

Who Do You Say I Am?: the Christ

Luke 14:12-24

March 28, 2010 Palm Sunday

Jimi (play Hendrix)

How many of you know who that performer was?

Back in 1968 when it was released I was in Jr. High and into The Beatles and The Association. Hendrix wasn't even really music, it was obnoxious noise.

By High School I understood there was something there, but I just didn't get it.

By college I was starting to understand that he was a god that had a mystical relationship with the guitar and did things that seemed to come from some other part of the cosmos and he was changing forever the way the guitar would be played.

Since 1968 so many people have learned from him that his work doesn't seem that incredible now, but in '68 he was preaching a message that very few really understood.

While Hendrix may not really be the incarnation of God, my total blindness, or deafness, to whom and what he was may help us to understand how it is very normal for people not to recognize divinity even when it's standing right in front of them.

Over the past weeks of Lent we have been answering the question of who Jesus was.

We have found him to be a healer and eater, who healed and ate with everyone as invitation into the just and egalitarian Realm of God about which he prophetically and apocalyptically preached and taught in the style of a Jewish cynic.

That is who he was.

When we look to the historical Jesus, this is the Jesus we find.

For the most part, this is the man that is presented to us in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

These gospels help us to understand who Jesus was.

But today we are going to examine the question that we are asked today:

“Who do you say I **AM**?”

You may have noticed that even Peter's profound response to Jesus question, "Who do you say I am?" was still an answer about the historical Jesus.

Peter's answer wasn't all that different from the answers others were giving.

Other people were saying that Jesus was a teacher or a prophet.

But even Peter's answer that he was "the Messiah" still didn't elevate him to the level of an incarnation of God.

The messiah was a man, just like any other, just better – not divine.

During Jesus life, while he's standing right there in front of them, the disciples seem to have had no idea of Jesus as God.

Even for Paul, Jesus was divine, even pre-existent in heaven, but not even for Paul was Jesus yet to be equated with God.

How do we go from teacher, to prophet, to messiah, to divine being, to *"God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made."*?

Well, it was probably Paul's fault and those like him, who defied the leadership of the Jerusalem church and started spreading word of Jesus to the Gentile, non-Jewish world, a Hellenistic world dominated by Hellenistic thought, including Greek Philosophical Dualism.

It was Greek Philosophical Dualism that saved Jesus from being a failed Jewish Messiah and made him the victorious Cosmic Christ.

Peter's response that Jesus was the Messiah was profoundly true, but I doubt if he really understood what he was saying when he said it.

The expectation, as Peter would have had, was still that the messiah was merely a man, like King David had been, who would come and forcefully remove the Roman occupying force and once again restore Israel to its former glory that it had under King David.

As this messiah – Jesus was a horrible failure. How is he going to conquer the evil Romans when all he does is turn the other cheek?

When his messianic failure is revealed, the people lose the faith.

Stories that he was resurrected impressed a few folk and reassured his closest disciples that all was not lost and that his understanding of God was right and that his spirit had not been defeated.

The result was that this small band of disciples would continue to spread the teachings and The Way, of Jesus.

The Way of Jesus spread and more people joined the movement until they became large enough to become a nuisance and their heretical teachings were causing strife in the synagogues and so the Jews where throwing them out of the synagogues and they became viewed by both the Jews and the Romans as cult of atheists.

So in the midst of all this comes this Jew, with Roman citizenship, and connections, who on behalf of Rome and the synagogues begins to persecute and execute these Christians. His name was Saul.

One day on the road to Damascus, Saul is struck down by a blinding vision of Jesus and Saul comes to the realization that Jesus was divine, that he was the Son of God, and come to realize that he too must become a believer.

But Saul, now to be called Paul, listening to a still speaking God, realizes that he must take the message into the gentile world.

Now Paul was not the first to do this, but he did become the most successful, influential and important Apostle.

His letters become the foundation for much of what was to become Christianity.

Paul delivers the gospel into the Hellenistic world where the synthesis of Jesus' gospel and Greek philosophy reveals a whole new understanding of who Jesus was.

While the Babylonians had given the Jews the idea that there was a spiritual world beyond the world we see where evil spirits battled the forces of God, and this is reflected in the stories of Jesus casting out demons and his temptation by the devil, the Greeks added the final missing piece to the puzzle – Greek Dualism.

AUGH! You say --- so what is this stupid Greek Dualism?

It is the notion that all things – all people -- have both a material and a spiritual side.

It was the idea that the body is merely a container for the spirit;

and that the material body is corruptible and finite, while the spirit is incorruptible and indestructible and lives on beyond the body.

This was the Apostle Paul's understanding of reality.

There was a hint of it in Jewish thought but for the gentiles, ever since Plato, 400 years earlier, this body/spirit dualism, was just the common understanding of everyone so when they heard of Jesus and that he had conquered death, they received this message in a totally new way.

Jesus was not the failed messiah who had failed at defeating the Romans in the material world of the body.

No, no – that is a total misunderstanding of who Jesus was and what he did.

Greek dualism allowed people to see that Jesus was the victorious messiah, the Christ, who had vanquished death and redeemed everyone in the spiritual world.

Jesus body died, but his spirit lived and in the process he had defeated the spiritual forces of evil.

Heck with little ol' Rome and being the Jewish Messiah.

Jesus was the Messiah of the Cosmos who had conquered spiritual evil and brought the promise of eternal life to all.

But Greek philosophy was not yet done with Jesus.

Early Christian thought had moved Jesus from a man to a pre-existent divine being, as we hear in the hymn that Paul recites.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him.”

Now, Jewish scriptures also spoke of God creating Sophia, or the wisdom or logos of God, through which God created the cosmos.

These two elements, of Jesus pre-existence and God's Sophia or Logos as the creative agent, worked well into the Hellenistic world where everyone knew for a fact, with the help of Plato, that the good unknowable God had created out of god's self, what people called a demiurge, a demi-god, but it was still god from God, and it was this demiurge god that created the cosmos.

Oh, my gosh they would say, this Jesus, this must be what this Jesus is all about.

He not only came from God, he was the incarnation of God, he was God from God, he is one and the same with this creative force that was born of God, God's only begotten son, through which all creation came to be.

And so 60-70 years, 3 generations, after Jesus death, John starts his gospel by saying:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

So at this point, we may ask the question, was this new development provided by the

gentiles a contamination and distortion of what Jesus was all about or the result of God's still speaking voice.

The gentiles took Jesus the man and turned him into Jesus the God.

They took Jesus' teachings about building the Kingdom of God in this world and moved it to a spiritual kingdom where he is God.

For centuries the Christian Church fought over who and what Jesus was, until the Council of Nicene in 325 codified it, saying once and for all that Jesus was both human and true God from true God.

And in the process rejected all the other Christian beliefs, of which there were many, as heresy.

But now the question is ours to answer.

So we have to make a decision before we can answer the question.

Here's the issue.

Just because those people who were there with Jesus didn't recognize who and what he really was at the time; does that mean we should end our understanding of who Jesus 'was and is' with them and their understanding.

Or, as it took me a while to understand that Hendrix was a guitar god, do the teachings of the church as they developed generations after Jesus' death simply disclose the inspiration of a still speaking God.

Do we end our investigation with the historical Jesus or did the Spirit have more to reveal about who and what Jesus was and is.

I didn't get Hendrix when he was alive.

It was years later his music started to make sense.

Perhaps, the later church, through the inspiration of the Spirit came to an understanding of who and what Jesus was and is -- that not even the disciples were able to see. Maybe!

I do believe that the same Spirit that was in Christ and that spoke to the early church is still speaking to us today.

That Spirit is still today revealing God's will and helping us to see who Jesus was and who Jesus is.

Only today, we aren't limited by viewing Jesus within the cosmological and philosophical understandings of the Greeks or the Jews.

As the Spirit speaks to us today, we are called to answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say I AM," but within our understanding reality and God.

That means taking into account relativity and quantum physics, wholistic [rather than dualistic] philosophies, and an understanding of perception and how our brains **construct** reality for us.

We likely live in a cosmos of multiple and parallel universes and realities that bend and break all of the greatest dreams of our imaginations.

A world where there may be 10 dimensions or no dimensions.

What does it mean to say that Jesus was the physical manifestation of Being itself?

Or, that Jesus was the incarnation of the process that brings all reality into being, not at some starting point, but rather in every moment of our lives?

We can affirm that Jesus is the Christ!

But what does that mean?

Oh, if you thought I was going to answer the question for you; you were sadly mistaken.

This is one that we must each answer for ourselves.

Do you hear his questioning voice? “Who do YOU say I AM?”

AMEN.