



# First Christian Church of Orange (Disciples of Christ)

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April 2, 2017 | Lent 5

**SERMON:** The Secret

**Question:** "But who do you say that I am?"

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 16:13-20

By Pastor Dayna Kinkade

*13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.*

I learned a new word this week. It is Miriam Webster's word of the day for March 31, 2017. The word is "transpicuous." Did you catch that? "Transpicuous" What an awesome word! "Transpicuous" Does anyone here know what it means? "Transpicuous" Thankfully, Miriam Webster provides definitions in additions to words. Transpicuous means: clearly seen through or understood.

Learning this new word, "transpicuous," I started to wonder if you could put an "un" in front of it for something that is not so clear. Unfortunately, there is no such word as untranspicuous. There are only antonyms for the word "transpicuous."

When I asked Google, "What is the opposite of transpicuous?" I got the following antonyms from Word Hippo:<sup>1</sup> Ambiguous, complicated, fuzzy, uncertain, unclear, unsure, vague, concealed, mysterious, obscured, incomprehensible, muddy, confused, murky, and opaque, to name a few.

Today, we are standing with the disciples as Jesus asks them what people are saying about who he is. So they tell him that some think he is John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or a prophet of some sort. If Jesus will hear us, we can tell him that some people confuse him with Santa Claus, while others think of him as some kind of hell-fire insurance. Some people think he is just a wise man who died with his integrity, while others think he is mad and going to return on a white horse and begin an apocalyptic bloodbath. Some people say he never existed and others say he is a naive dreamer. A growing number of people just say, "Who?"

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wordhippo.com/what-is/the-opposite-of/transpicuous.html>

Jesus then looks at us and asks, "But who do you say I am?" Do you have a transpicuous answer? Is there a transpicuous answer?

Peter seems to think so. He jumps right in with his answer, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." In the gospel of Mark he just says, "You are the Christ." (Mark 8:29). In case you are wondering, "Messiah" and "Christ," even though they come from different languages, mean exactly the same thing, "anointed."<sup>2</sup> Is that transpicuous enough for you? It isn't for me. I want to ask Peter, "What are you saying here?" What does it mean to call Jesus the anointed? I'm not convinced Peter knew what he was saying.

There are a few verses in Matthew that are not in Mark that talk about the church, and Peter "the rock" which were probably added on later for a reason I am not preaching about today. This little addition interrupts the story, but not in a good way...because it makes it sound like Peter knows what he is talking about. But if you read on you will eventually get to the next section, also found in Mark., where Jesus says he is going to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and rise again.

Peter scratches his head and says, "Wait a minute, that's not what a Messiah does? The Messiah – the Christ – is going to save us from these Romans and make Israel great again. A messiah doesn't suffer and die." So Peter pulls Jesus aside and says, "God forbid, this can't happen to you!" At which point Jesus tells Peter, "Get behind me Satan!"

For a second it appears that Peter has given a transpicuous answer – but then we find out he doesn't know what he is talking about. He says the right word – but his idea of a messiah and Jesus' idea of a messiah are two completely different things.

Peter took a go at Jesus' question. What about you? What is your answer when Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" I'll talk a little more while you try to come up with a transpicuous answer.

When you study the history of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) you learn that the founders called Peter's answer the "Good Confession." They were staunchly against anything that sounded like a creed. Their slogan was "No creed but Christ!" They figured that Christians may not agree on the particulars but at least we can all say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It's Biblical. Many of you who have been with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for any length of time may remember making your confession of faith. The minister took your hand and asked you, "Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and do you proclaim him Lord and Savior?" That comes straight from Peter – that is the Good Confession. That Good Confession is the one thing most Disciples agree on – Jesus is the Christ or Messiah. But we don't agree on what it means. There is no transpicuous answer for Disciples.

So, do you have your answer for Jesus? "Who do YOU say I am?" he asks.

Would it matter to your answer if I told you that just after Jesus told Peter he had to suffer and die he said that anyone who wants to follow him must deny themselves and take up their cross?

If I told you that Jesus said that you could sum up the commandments into two: love God and love your neighbor, would that help? If I told you that Jesus was willing to sacrifice his comfort and his life to make

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.quora.com/Do-Christ-and-Messiah-have-similar-meaning> (answer can be found many places – this was brief and to the point.)

this world a better place – would that help? If I told you that Jesus was a non-violent resister that believed love is the only thing that will transform this earth – would that help? If I told you that Jesus didn't come to make any one nation great – but he did redefine greatness by saying the last shall be first – would that help?

"Who do YOU say I am?" he asks.

Peter had it all wrong. He saw Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a white horse with guns blazing to save the day. Jesus, as we shall see next week, chose a much different way to enter the city.

Has your answer changed over the course of your lifetime? It sure has mine.

When I was a kid – to believe that Jesus is the Christ – meant going to heaven when I die.

Today – believing that Jesus is the Christ is to say that Caesar is not. The kingdom Jesus came to inaugurate on earth as it is in heaven is not like the empires of this world. To say Jesus is the Christ is to live as a citizen of God's kingdom of justice and liberty for ALL. To say Jesus is the Christ is to say he is the one to whom I pledge my allegiance. He is the one I follow – albeit imperfectly.

What has influenced my thinking about Jesus is modern Biblical scholarship and historical scholarship. Scholars can extract the historical figure of Jesus in the context of the Roman empire from the layers of things Biblical writers added for the benefit of the church in their age. Studying Jesus in this context, with good scholarship, reveals a person who resisted the lure of power and violence and chose instead, the path of love and non-violence. Studying Jesus as a Jew helps us to see how Jesus' agenda has been God's agenda all along – the redemption of creation – on earth.

Understanding Jesus in the context in which he lived helps me know how to live in a world where self-interest, greed, and violence is accepted as common sense and even affirmed as good.

"Who do you say I am?" He asks. It is probably a good thing our answers are not transpicuous. Because the answer evolves in the following – on the journey with Jesus – along with other imperfect people trying to answer this one question. It is not enough to trust what your third-grade Sunday School teacher told you...

This one question, "Who do you say I am?" takes a lifetime to answer – and even then – the answer is not transpicuous.

At the end of the day we Jesus asks us to trust him. The path that takes us to Jerusalem – to confront the powers of corruption and injustice – might just lead us to a cross. It might look like defeat. But a cross cannot stop what Jesus has begun. Out of Jesus' grave came the "body of Christ" and Jesus' work continues – the work of God's kingdom continues.

"Who do YOU say I am?" Jesus asks.