

“But who do you say that I am?” is Jesus’ question to all of us today.

We could **answer that question** with a **lot of facts** that we might know about Jesus.

Or **on a deeper level**, we could **include what Jesus taught**, what he **grieved about**, what **upset him** and other things that are **recorded in Scripture**...but those, too, are **just facts**.

To give a **more meaningful answer** to the **question**, we would have to **mention spiritual and intimate ways** that Jesus has **affected our own life and belief system**.

We say **who Jesus is** through **our actions and words**.

We say **who Jesus is** through **what we profess to believe** and through the **commitments we make**.

And we say **who Jesus is** by the **priority we give to God, faith, church and prayer**.

“Who do you say that I am?” is really a **summary of other questions** that Jesus could have asked, - **“How am I coming across to you?”** - **“From observing me, what do you think I stand for?”** - **“What have you bought into from my teachings or example?”**

YOU have to **formulate your OWN response** to Jesus’ question; it may be **much different than mine**.

Some parts of MY answer to Jesus’ question would be the following.

Along with the apostle Peter, I believe Jesus WAS the **long-awaited-for Messiah** – I have **staked my life** on that.

I believe Jesus was the **“son of the living God”** – a God Jesus **addressed intimately as “Abba”** which is less formal than **“Father,”** actually closer to **“Daddy”** indicating a very **warm, close relationship**.

Sometimes, I need Jesus to be **Lord, Redeemer or Savior** – at other times he is **teacher, brother or friend** – the **listening, supportive, inspirational strength** of my life.

I believe deeply that **Jesus was fully human, tested and tempted** as we are through all the **growing pains** from childhood through adulthood.

Therefore, he can **understand** all of my **thoughts, actions, temptations, experiences, dumb choices** and **bad days**.

I see Jesus as a **model for maintaining prayer as a CENTRAL part of my life** – he modeled the **critical need for some solitude, stillness and quiet time in each of our lives; I do not function well without it**.

He showed how it is **okay to escape, to get away** even when some people think **they need me** or think I **should be available**.

Jesus showed me **how to deal with the human institutions of religion and authority**.

He studied the **teachings** of his **Jewish faith** with a **critical eye** and an **open heart**.

Some teachings he **ignored**, some he **upheld** and some he **confronted and condemned**.

Jesus **boldly exposed** and **disagreed with** anything that **“smacked of”** self-righteousness, **hypocrisy, arrogance, “lording it over others”** or **“binding up heavy burdens for others to carry.”**

Jesus **modeled** the **openness** I try to have toward **children, the oppressed, the outcasts, the stranger, the sinner, the sick** and the **less fortunate people** in our world.

Jesus certainly is my model for **not getting hooked into popularity contests**.

He did **not change his priorities or values** to **please anyone** and he even **encouraged his disciples** to **“shake the dust from [their] sandals”** and **leave the individuals, groups and towns** that did not want to hear their message.

In other words, **I am not to waste my time on close-minded people who think their agenda is the only one that is important**.

Having to **put up with impossible people**, people who **think everyone should think like they do** - was NOT part of Jesus’ call, the apostle’s call, my call or your call.

Jesus taught me as a preacher ***NOT to use complicated theological language or thoughts*** that few can understand.

He ***told stories*** and ***used everyday experiences of people*** and the ***wonders of nature*** which people were ***familiar with*** to make his points.

Jesus showed me that I am ***better off WITH and IN the Church*** than ***OUTSIDE*** her, even though ***some of the institutional things at times*** can upset us and drive us to ***distraction*** as they did Jesus.

Jesus was ***centered on the Jewish faith***, on his ***loving Father in heaven*** and constantly ***tried to clear away*** the ***man-made baggage*** and ***layers of laws and rules*** from the ***central message of faith and love*** that sometimes gets lost in the clutter or as ***human beings want to make their importance felt***.

I believe Jesus established his Church because he ***recognized*** it was ***good for people to be focused*** – to have some ***direction*** and ***assistance in being centered on God but not to be beat up with a lot of man-made rules or guilt trips***.

Jesus had his ***private ways of praying often amidst God's creation***, but he also ***regularly joined in public prayer***.

It is through this PUBLIC PRAYER that we are ***taught, challenged and affirmed through the support of our neighbors*** and this is where we ***respond to Jesus' command, "DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME!"***

Jesus went to ***a lot of parties and banquets with sinners and had deep friendships with a few people***.

He must have had a ***quick wit and sense of humor***, was not intimidating to ***children or outcasts***, but ***bugged the heck out of the self-righteous who thought he should think like them and inflict guilt on others for not following their rules***.

Through Jesus' stories, he continues to show that ***God's creation which surrounds us can be our teacher***.

We are moving toward another ***dramatic seasonal change*** that teaches us about ***God's abundant blessings through harvest***, as the ***earth gives up its produce to sustain us***.

We will enjoy the ***splendor of fall colors – a new school year***, the ***warmth of a fire place*** when a chill sets in – or we might ***look forward*** to the ***hunting season and other fall activities***.

Birth, death and new life again is the ***familiar cycle*** we live through year after year – that can ***teach us*** about the ***hope Jesus brought us*** through his ***birth, death and resurrection***.

Who Jesus is in MY life is so much more than ***these few words***, but hopefully my ***actions, words and on-going preaching*** are ***consistent with who I say Jesus is in my life***.

If you were asked to give your testimony how would you answer the question -

"And, YOU, who do YOU say Jesus is?"