

Once there was a rich man who wanted to do something good for someone in his community. He spent a few days just traveling around his neighborhood and the general vicinity. During his travels, he noticed the poor living conditions of a certain carpenter who lived nearby. So the rich man went to the carpenter and hired him to build a house.

"Now this isn't just any old house you'll be building," the rich man said to the carpenter. ***"I want you to build this house for a very special person. I want you to use only the finest building materials, hire the best workmen you can find, and spare no expense. I'm going to be out of town for a couple of months, and I would like to see the house finished when I return."***

The carpenter saw this as a wonderful opportunity to make some extra money. He skimmed on building materials, hired winos that hung out at the local bus station to help with the work, paying them as little as he could. He covered their mistakes with paint and plaster and cut corners at every opportunity.

When the rich man returned from his trip, the carpenter brought him the keys to the house and said, ***"I followed your instructions and built the house just as you told me to."***

"I'm glad you did," the rich man said. Then he handed the keys back to carpenter saying, **"The special person I wanted the house for is YOU. It is yours! You and your family can have it as my gift to you, and I am sure you want to move in right away!"**

One of the most difficult factors of Christian living is that we never know—HOW or WHERE or WHEN God will act. We do not know exactly how God might help us, regardless of the time we spend in prayer. The God we worship and serve is a God who constantly SURPRISES us. And this inability to predict God's movements can be very frustrating sometimes.

Our Gospel reading for today looks at ONE aspect of this issue. It deals with the problem of getting what we want, only to discover that it's not exactly what we thought it would be. (I'm sure that's never happened to any of you!)

Here's the story: For many months Jesus had been traveling through the countryside, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, teaching in parables, and proclaiming the good news of the love of God for all God's children. If opinion polls had been taken in those days, I'm sure Jesus would have had a very high acceptability rating at this point in his ministry. Large crowds were gathering to hear him preach. Still more folks were coming to him seeking healing, both of the physical and spiritual aspects of their being. Holistic healing is not a new concept, you know. Jesus certainly believed in dealing with mental and spiritual ailments as well as physical aches and pains.

But in spite of his apparent popularity, we get a sense that Jesus was troubled about something. HE KNEW HE WAS NOT "EXACTLY" WHAT THE PEOPLE WANTED. The very ones he had been sent to save totally misunderstood his purpose in coming.

That's not an uncommon occurrence. People see things differently all the time. For example, three people – a minister, an archaeologist, and a cowboy – were getting their first look at the Grand Canyon one day. The minister exclaimed, "Truly this is one of the glories of God!" The archaeologist commented, "What a wonder of nature this is!" And the cowboy said, "Can you imagine trying to find a lost steer in there?" **People see things differently.**

The MESSIANIC BELIEF of those in the Jewish community who held such a belief was that the Chosen One would reestablish POWER...that Israel would be among the great nations of the world. The assumption was that this would be accomplished in a violent and vengeful manner, with the forceful overthrow and total destruction of the current ruling powers. But for this to happen, the prophet Elijah would return to herald the coming of the Chosen One.

So Jesus had to communicate to his disciples and others HIS IDENTITY...HIS PURPOSE...and what he was offering, telling them that who he was something completely different from what they expected.

Jesus' followers did not and could not understand that **to be the Messiah** that God had sent him to be, **he would have to STRUGGLE TERRIBLY, TO SUFFER, AND, ultimately, die a cruel death.**

And so, one day Jesus invited his disciples to sit and rest awhile on a quiet hillside. Perhaps he came to this secluded place to prepare himself for the difficult days that lay ahead. It wouldn't be long now until he began the final journey to Jerusalem and Calvary. But this was also a time of testing for his disciples, perhaps even a time of self-evaluation for Jesus, a time of wondering if he was accomplishing what he had set out to do.

Maybe around a campfire in the evening of what had been the first really relaxing day anyone in the group could remember in a long, long time, *Jesus asked his friends a question he had never asked them before.* **"Who do people say that I am?" he asked.**

Most likely the disciples were careful in giving their answer. They didn't want to mention any of the bad things they must have heard folks say about Jesus. Instead they responded positively. **"Well, Lord, we've heard lots of good things about you.** Some people say you're the ghost of John the Baptist, and some even say that you're the reincarnation of Elijah himself, the greatest prophet in our history. That's pretty high praise, isn't it, Lord?"

But Jesus didn't stop there. He wanted to know more. And so he asked this group of close friends, these who knew him better than anyone else, **"Okay, now tell me who YOU think I am."** An awkward silence followed his question, as the disciples exchanged nervous glances, looked down at their feet or off into the distance, as if searching for an answer that just wouldn't come. They had no problem reporting what other people were saying about who Jesus was, but when it came to expressing their own innermost understanding of who he was, they weren't quite so eager to speak.

After what must have seemed like a long time, Peter broke the silence, saying, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." I wonder if Peter really knew what he was going to say before he said it. He was rather quick in his response! **I wonder if he understood the full meaning of "Messiah, Son of the Living God."**

AS YOUNG PEOPLE WE WATCH THE ADULTS IN OUR LIFE AND PROBABLY WONDER WHO THEY ARE. IN FACT, Psychologist tell us, we model our lives after those who grow up with daily...our parents our teachers, our older brothers and sisters, grandparents, those who are in our lives every day.

YES, some are good and some are bad. Take for instance...VIDEO....

JESUS, OUR LORD, CAME TO THIS EARTH...NEVER HIDING A THING...SHOWING ALL OF WHO HE WAS... GOD IN THE FLESH...GOD WHO IS PURE LOVE...AND HE ASKED..."Who do people say that I am?" So let me ask You... **"Who is he to you???"**

As I worked with this text, a strange thought entered my mind, **I wondered what would happen if, instead of preaching a sermon, I gave YOU a POP QUIZ.** (*don't leave! I'm not really going to do that!*) What if I had just read the scripture and then passed out to each of you a pencil and a piece of paper with one question written on it: **"Who do you say that Jesus is?"** How would you respond? **In agreement with Peter,** some of you may have written down the words recorded in Matthew's gospel for today, **"Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."** Others might have echoed the words of Thomas, **"Jesus is my Lord and my God."** Still others might have written, **"Jesus is the best friend I ever had."** **Who do you say that Jesus is?**

Yes, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, the second person of the Trinity, our Lord and Savior, but what do these titles mean to us today? Maybe our answers would be more complete if we simply listed words that describe what we mean. **Jesus is:** *loving, gentle, compassionate, understanding, and forgiving.* **Jesus is:** *my helper, my guide, my friend, my God.* **Simply put, who is Jesus to you?**

Children have a wonderful ability for deeply religious concepts in simple language. Listen to some of their questions about God and Jesus and religion in general: **"Will my dog go to heaven when she dies? If Jesus is up in heaven, how can he be here with us at the same time? My Grandpa never went to church with us before he died. Is he in heaven now? If heaven is up in the sky, how come the astronauts haven't seen it?"** How would you answer their questions?

Kids are not the only ones who have questions... grownups also have questions of faith too. Many of us talk about the questions we want to ask God if and when we get to heaven. *"If you really love the world, God, why is there so much STRUGGLING, HATRED AND PAIN?? Why do some people starve to death while others have more food than they know what to do with? Why do people kill each other? Why are there earthquakes that kill thousands of people and injure thousands more?"* I'm sure you could add to that list of questions.

A young woman lost her closest friend in an automobile accident. And then her teenage daughter came home drunk and half-dressed. On her way home from the hospital, after having a lump removed from her breast, this young woman saw a bumper sticker that said, *"Jesus is the answer."* And she couldn't help thinking to herself, *"Jesus is the answer to what – my loneliness, my feelings of failure as a mother, my fear of cancer? Exactly what is Jesus the answer to? And if Jesus IS the answer, then why are all these bad things happening to me? I'm a Christian. Why, ALL THE STRUGGLES--God?"*

Sometimes in our zeal to be messengers of the good news, we answer a little too quickly. We don't want anyone to know that we just aren't exactly sure what we mean when we say that Jesus is the Son of the Living God, or that Jesus is the answer. We wouldn't want anyone to think that our faith is anything less than strong and secure. As people of God, we feel that we need to know all the answers to questions of faith, when in reality we have trouble answering the one question that Jesus asks his disciples of every age, "Who do you say that I am?"

And so, when questions of faith come up, we're tempted to give a short reply like, *"Jesus is the answer,"* then change the subject as quickly as we can. If we say more than that, someone might realize that we don't have all the answers, and how would that look? Who do you say that Jesus is? The gift of faith places the confession on our lips, "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." But every day we must struggle to understand exactly what that means when we're faced with the difficult questions of life and faith. When these questions arise in your life – and they will – God doesn't expect you to have all the answers. We CAN confess our faith, and I certainly encourage you to do that. **But sometimes it's also okay to admit,** *"I just don't know the answer to that. I don't completely understand how God works. No one does. But I'm working on it. I'm searching for answers, just like you. Maybe we can look together. Would you like that?"*

SO INSTEAD OF A POP QUIZ, LETS JUST STICK WITH THE TRUTH....God sent His son to live among us...to teach, heal and LOVE US AS MUCH AS HE COULD. He did this well, so that most believers realize, **YES, he is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.**

But then he had to die a hard, painful death. And once in the TOMB, he had to struggle 3 days, to rise from it again—so that you and I could celebrate the GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE—the promise that he is with us now and he will be with us forever.

HIS "STRUGGLE" was for us so that OUR FINAL STRUGGLE WOULD MAKE US "COMPLETE."

A family brought in two cocoons that were about to hatch. They watched as the first one began to open and the butterfly inside squeezed very slowly and painfully through a tiny hole that it chewed in one end of the cocoon. After lying exhausted for about ten minutes following its agonizing emergence, the butterfly finally flew out the open window on its beautiful new wings.

The family decided to help the second butterfly so that it would not have to go through such an excruciating ordeal. So, as it began to emerge, they carefully sliced open the cocoon with a razor blade, doing the equivalent of a Caesarean section. The second butterfly never did sprout wings, and in about ten minutes, instead of flying away, it quietly died.

The family asked a biologist friend to explain what had happened. The scientist said that the difficult struggle to emerge from the small hole pushes liquids from deep inside the butterfly's body cavity into tiny capillaries in the wings. This helps the wings harden and the beautiful adult butterfly emerges healthy and complete.

In Our "POP LESSON" Today we learn.... that Jesus' STRUGGLE WAS NECESSARY...WHY? It helps to make him the "MESSIAH," the Son of the Living, and Loving God!! So, NAME HIM: "Messiah!" CLAIM HIM AS YOUR: "Lord!" And as you do, Your Life will be Complete!! Amen.