

St. Andrew's UMC
August 24th, 2008
Matthew 16:13-20
"Who do You Say That I Am?"

In the process of becoming a citizen of the United States , the immigrant must pass the interview with the examiner. The immigrant is asked the questions such as: "What is the capitol of the State of Delaware ," or, "Who was the first president of the United States ?"

A grandmother who had been invited to the United States by her children wanted to become a citizen. So she studied hard. But it was such a difficult thing to learn another foreign language late in her 70s. Her son was trying to teach her the name of the first president, but she had difficulty remembering an English name, let alone pronouncing it correctly.

Then he had an idea: "Mom, you know the name of the big bridge that I have to cross everyday to go to work in Manhattan , right?"

"Of course, I do, son. That is near from our place."

"Do you know what that bridge is called?"

"Oh, wait a minute... I know the name! Now you said it, it is in my mouth. I got it: 'Giogie Washinton Brigie!'"

"That's right, Mom. That bridge's named after the first president, George Washington. Now you remember who the first president was, right?"

"Oh, that was so easy! Son, why didn't you tell me that sooner? I already know the name!"

Soon, the day of exam came. The son reminded his mother for the last time, as she left for the exam room: "Mom, just remember the name of the bridge, okay?" "I've got it, Son. Do you think I'm stupid, because I am old?"

The lady sat down, and the examiner eventually came to that question, for which she studied so hard: "What is the name of the first president of the United States ?" The grandma proudly replied without missing a beat: "Giogie Washinton Brigie!"

I am not sure, if that lady actually passed and became a new citizen. If becoming a citizen is a difficult thing, what about becoming the president of the United States ?

The candidate who promises the change in America is portrayed as an elitist by his rival, while the candidate who tried to pass himself off as the people's guy could not even remember how many houses he owns. The agent of change is reputed to have secured a sweet loan through the service of a convicted felon, in order to buy his house, while his rival thinks being rich is defined by the income of \$5 million and up. I guess that makes us all poor, then.

How would these stories do you believe influence the average Joe's opinion on the candidates, and how will they help the average Joe vote? Who does the average Joe say Obama is? Who does the average Joe say McCain is? How would these stories do you believe influence your voting? You know that you would not be influenced by these stories, but others would, right?

What actually influences you to vote for one candidate, but not the other? What would influence, or inspire, you to believe in one candidate, but not in the other? Who do you say that Obama is? Who do you say McCain is?

I believe that Jesus was thinking about the same thing, when he asked his disciples the question: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

The disciples said, they say that you are John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. We must note that the people believed that Jesus was one of those famous people who came back from the dead. The average Jacob could not really see who Jesus really was. They could see him only as one of the copy of the prophets who lived in the previous time. To them, Jesus was rather like more of the same, or the repeat of the same. Isn't it exactly what the campaign politics is doing—painting one another in a broad brush stroke that the other candidate is going to be the *bidness as usual*?

So Jesus asks his disciples directly: "**Who do you say that I am?**" Now, that is the challenge. As believers, they must confess who

Jesus is, just as the backers of one presidential candidate must confess, also. When the believers confess who Jesus is, it reveals not just who Jesus is, but also a lot about who they want Jesus to be. That reveals a lot about the one who makes the confession.

And when Simon hit the nail, Jesus confirmed to him where the source of the knowledge originated from: it was God the Father who revealed it to him, not other people. And Jesus further confirmed to Simon two things: Jesus confirmed the new identity of Simon by renaming him as rock (Peter), and he gave him the key of the kingdom of heaven.

This key of the kingdom of heaven empowered him with the ability to make what is done on earth is also meaningful in the heaven. That translates into this: when we confess who Jesus is, according to the revelation of God the Father, not according to the selfish interests of the flesh and blood, we are given the key. What we accomplish on earth is also accomplished in the heaven. In other words, what we commit on earth does not turn into dust or ashes, but is perpetuated also in the heaven.

There is an old saying: A tiger leaves its skin; but a man leaves his name. We human beings have the desire to leave their footprints on the earth. They want to have names remembered for a long, long time. Who would Michael Phelps say that he is? He would say, "I'm the only Olympian with 11 gold career medals!" Then Tiger Woods might counter, "I am the only sportsman with \$1B life-time income prospect, simply doing what I do. How much did you say you make?"

One does not need to be well-known persons as these athletes, in order to feel the urge for the name. I think the human race is obsessed with leaving its footprints behind.

If we asked Jesus why he decided to become a messiah, do you think Jesus would say: "**I have decided to become a messiah, because I wanted to have my name remembered, that's why.**" Is it why Jesus said, "**Do this in remembrance of me?**"

Jesus did say, "Do this, in remembrance of me," but he said it, because he was determined to give up his body and shed his blood

for everyone. Jesus realized the cost of his calling, yet he accepted it. What he accomplished on earth is also perpetuated in the heaven.

Very few accomplish great things for the benefit of others. Those who want to become a messiah—those who want to save the humanity—all want to live on as the messiah, and bask in the spotlight for as long as possible. We may one day have a president dedicated to the welfare of our country, not just to that of the few, but how many do you believe had been determined to give his or her life for the people of the United States while in the Oval Office? Much less, has any president ever requested that the presidential library not be built on his behalf?

Each one of us is called to be a somebody in God's vision. God has the vision of the kingdom of God. Jesus witnessed it, and tried to share it with the rest of us. When we confess Jesus as who he is, that is, not according to whom we want him to be, or according to our selfish interests, etc, our identities change. When we declare that Jesus is the Messiah, we also declare the purposes of our lives as we intend to live, according to that calling. When we declare that Jesus is our Lord, we have decided to commit our lives to the life that will not turn to dust after we are buried in the earth, but be perpetuated in the heaven.

When we confess that Jesus is the messiah, the Son of the living God, we are committed to the new life which the new identity affords. When our identities change, the purposes of our lives also change, and we participate in God's vision as new persons with the new purposes. But the question does not end with asking who Jesus is. Jesus would ask us, "Who do you say that you are?"

When we declare that we are Christians, we have already determined to live according to a certain way of life. We are not just Christians, individually, but also the Body of Christ, as a community. We are a community of believers, called to be a body of Christ. And we have a name: St. Andrew's United Methodist Church.

We need to ask this question among our selves: Who do people say St. Andrew's United Methodist Church is? We must know how our faith community is perceived by others. Then Jesus would ask us:

“Who do you say that St. Andrew’s United Methodist Church is?”

Before we attempt to answer that question, we must make sure one thing: we must commit ourselves to live up to that name. That commitment has a name tag: it is known to us, although it sounds mundane, as the membership. Some wear the name tag, but yet to be committed. Others choose not to wear it, yet as committed as any member is. Regardless, the question still stands: **“Who do you say that St. Andrew’s United Methodist Church is?”**

Once we are committed to this name, our community of faith will be given the key to the kingdom of Heaven. Whatever we bind on earth as a community of faith, it will be bound in the heaven, and whatever we loose on the earth as a community of faith, it will be loosed in the heaven.