By way of introduction let me tell you this story that happened not too long ago.
In my former church, there was a bulletin board with the pictures of the church staff. It was a bulletin board that a young child at the daycare at the church stumbled upon with his mother. I was opening my office door around the corner, and I could hear the child talking about the staff members. I peeked around the corner. And there was this boy about 4 years old, and his mother was pointing at the bulletin board at our church’s cook. The boy was saying, “That’s Diane.” His mother said, “That’s right.”
The child pointed to the next picture, “There’s Freddie the custodian.” “That’s right.”
The boy, “There’s Julie the receptionist.”
“Right!” said his mother and who is this?”
“Mildred the secretary.” The boy replied.
“Right.”
The next picture was my picture. “Okay who is this?” said the mom. And the child without missing a beat said,
“Oh mama, you know who that is. It’s God!”
I thought now that is a smart kid.

I tell you that story as a means of introducing myself to you. Let me begin by saying, “I am not God.” I don’t know all things, I can’t walk on water, I can’t be all things to all people.

But if I was to say who I am, I might begin by saying I am one who is excited about being your new pastor. My hope is to serve you faithfully

I am one who loves his wife and his family. I love a good story. I love to laugh.
But there is something more. I am one who strives to understand, to pursue, and to follow the one under whose name we are all called. The Christ.

And there are times when I know exactly who he is, but there are times in my life when I have been surprised, much like someone whom we read about in today’s scripture.

Mark 8: 27 – 33
Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others,
one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

I think you see it from time to time. There is that desire in us to not only mold ourselves into whomever we think we should be, but there is that desire to do it to others.

Not long ago I was on the hospital elevator with a rather large young man who wore a Carolina Panthers coat and was carrying a football under his arm. The man was obviously into football. I said to him, “Panthers aren’t doing well this year.” He said, “Yes, They just can’t seem to get it together.” The door opened and he was getting off, and my curiosity was getting the best of me. I said, “Excuse me. What’s with the football in the hospital?” As the door closed, he yelled: “Baby boy!” and I knew. That father not only had a baby boy, but he had every hope in the world that one day he’d have a ticket on the fifty-yard line at a probowl game watching his son.

I’ve done the same thing. Don’t you know that when we named our children Michael and McKenzie that in the back of my mind I knew their initials were MD, Medical Doctor? I’m looking for a way for my children to provide me with an early retirement!

If we can just make people into what we would like them to be, mold them.

And I remember the church secretary who was there for 24 years. And then one day she retired. When the new one arrived the members made every effort to make sure that the new secretary did things just like the one who was there for 24 years. “No dear, the bulletin needs to be done on Thursday, not Wednesday.”

I get the sense that is exactly what Peter was trying to do in our passage today. For today Jesus asks his disciples a simple question, “Who do the people say that I am?” And the answer comes back. “Some say Elijah, some say one of the prophets.”


It is the right answer. It is the answer to the question that keeps popping up in Mark’s gospel from start to finish.
In the calm after the storm...Who is this man that even the wind and the waves obey him?
In the synagogue after the teaching. Who is this man who teaches with such authority?
In the emptiness of a tomb, it is a decision of fear or faith. Who is this man?
And today it is a question posed to his disciples. It is for you and me to decide. Who do you say that I am?

The Christ. So quick to answer, Peter! Right answer! Wrong answer!
Because when Jesus said that he must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and be killed, Peter would have no such nonsense.

That is not the Christ. That is not the Messiah. Molding, bending, twisting. Jesus, you’ve got it wrong. The messiah is for good things. A messiah is for the establishment of Israel. The throne of David. It is good news! That is what we’ve proclaimed through history, when the messiah comes, it will mean an end to suffering.
There, there don’t cry when the Messiah comes you’ll see everything will be fine. When the messiah comes everything will be different.
When the Messiah comes the poor will be raised up. When the Messiah comes...
And to that Jesus says, with the presence of the messiah there will be rejection. There will be suffering. There will be death.
No Jesus! No!

How do you like your Jesus? I’ve seen him different ways. I picked up the paper the other day and there was the picture of the crowd outside the penitentiary and inside the penitentiary a young woman who was a cold blooded murder was dying. And they say that when she was dying the name of Jesus was on her lips. I don’t know what to make of that.

And when she was dead, the name of Jesus on the placard that was being high and lifted up on a celebrating protestor. Prepare for Judgement day. I don’t know what to make of that.

But you know twisting and turning, bending and molding we can get Jesus right where we want him. You can find Jesus supporting gun control or buying guns. You can find Jesus the Democrat and Jesus the Republican. You can find Jesus at the ball game and he’s dressed in either shard of blue. This Jesus sells automobiles and tickets for bus trips. Jesus will send you on a crusade to the Holy Land or a war in the Gulf. He’s got a condo in Florida where you can lie in the sun and thank God how blessed you are. This Jesus sell. How do you like your Jesus?

I know there are days when I want more out of this Jesus. That in my heart there is more ego than faith. I want this one we follow to bless us with people. Let’s get this steeple a little higher in the community, let’s get this pulpit raised up. Let’s get the people in this door. And pack it out and money can flow in and people will recognize us
as a church and we can be something. And then I catch myself taking Jesus by the arm and taking him up to a high hill and saying, “Look out yonder, Jesus, you see all the world, do you see all the riches?, do you see all the power?, you can have it. If you just give me what I’m asking. Just bow down, Jesus, and give me what I want.

And I hear him say, “Get behind me, Satan.”
In this is the supreme question of Mark’s gospel. Throughout this gospel. But, Jesus says that to be the Christ and follow the Christ, it is to follow the suffering.

I have come to find that is true.
Tell Jamaica story
Tell women on the back row story.

As your pastor. I hope to be alongside of you on this road we will travel. In the good and the bad, and wherever it is that we find the Christ. So that when we are against the wall we might search for the face of Jesus. We might point to the face of Jesus and say, “I know, I know that face to be the Christ, The son of God.”

The Rev. Dr. Donovan Drake