

First Fifteen: November 15-19
Scripture for Sunday November 21 – Revelation 1:4b-8

Monday: Mark 8:27-30

Going Deeper: Other people's perception matters. I know of at least one App that somehow gathers this information and then shares with you that your reputation is out there living on the internet somewhere! And of course, if you buy the App you can then have a say in how your online reputation plays out. This story in Mark 8 tells us of a time when Jesus asked his disciples what people were saying about him. His concern was not about how well he was like or disliked. He wanted to assess their understanding of his ministry and mission. *"Who do the people say I am?"* lead him to the true question he was curious to know more about... *"Who do you say I am?"* This Sunday is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday in the church calendar. The new church year begins with the four weeks of Advent and their preparations for our celebration of Christmas and God's incarnation through the birth of the Christ Child. I encourage you to take a moment to ponder what it means to affirm Jesus as Christ who is your King. As you do take a moment to give thanks for all God has done for you throughout this past year. When we recognize and understand how God's love for us impacts and shapes how we see and understand ourselves and others, it helps us clarify who Jesus is for us beyond Sunday morning.

Prayer: How amazing is your love O God. How wonderful to trust that you are with me, your presence always near. As this week begins help me to take time to pause when I feel myself being caught up in the stress or anxiety of my days to refocus myself, grounding my heart in the truth that you hold me within every moment of my day. Help me to consider throughout this day and beyond how my perception of who you are shapes me and how I respond to others. How amazing is your love, my Jesus who is my Christ. Amen.

Tuesday: Mark 8:31-35

Going Deeper: Yesterday we read Peter's declaration "you are the Christ, our Messiah and King!" I suspect you may have found Jesus' response to Peter confusing... "do not tell anyone." These next verses (I hope) will give us some idea of Jesus' meaning. It is amazing how quickly circumstances can turn. I suspect Peter felt as if he had stepped into a whirlwind of emotions, feeling like he had given the answer Jesus wanted, only to find himself being chastised a moment later. And yet Peter's response was completely normal. His desire to follow and help Jesus finish his mission and ministry was his highest priority! These verses illustrate the lessons of faith and learning that takes place for all of us. As we go deeper into what it means to be a follower of Jesus, we discover his mission is not merely to reconnect us to God, but also to help us discover our true self in Christ as Thomas Merton defined it. This discovery of our True Self helps us realize our life is most full and deeply connected to God in service to those in need and through choice of self-denial to help meet the needs of others. I believe Jesus' response to Peter's declaration was not to silence him, but to give him and the others time to

grow deeper in their understanding so they had a complete picture of who “The Christ” was and the nature of Jesus’ ultimate mission.

Prayer: Be near me Lord Jesus in the moments of this day. Help me to hear you call to follow you in all of them. Help me to embrace your love that leads me to trust God’s care and provision for me and my family, allowing me to grow deeper into my faith in you and my connection to God’s love for me. Amen.

Wednesday: 1 Peter 2:4-9

Going Deeper: “Sticks and stone will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” This childhood taunt is given new meaning through “childlike” faith, trusting in the “living word” of God we know as Jesus the Christ (John 1:1-14) who has become the foundation stone of our faith. But Peter’s teaching goes even further in these verses, where he takes this image and applies it to our lives... *“You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood.”* 1 Peter 2:5 (CEB) As you hear this, what is your immediate response? The imagery used by Peter is not common today, but his point is powerful and relevant. He is challenging us as followers of Jesus to see ourselves as cooperating with Jesus, understanding our lives are part of God’s work to reveal the message of hope and redemption for those who do not know him. In saying you and I are being built into living stones Peter is simply reminding us our lives are to reflect what we say we believe about Jesus. The image of a “royal priesthood” does not connote special privilege. Instead, it suggests our faith is to be evident in our daily engagements, this then becomes our sacrifice to God and witness for others. Peter envisions us, people as the church, our lives are the stones which become the church as they are laid upon the corner or foundation stone of Jesus. What comes to mind for you most often when you refer to the church? The church building is made from brick and mortar, but you and I extend and enliven church far beyond the walls where the building is situated. As a child I was taught to clasp my hands with my fingers turned inward and my thumbs close together with my index fingers pointing upward touching at my fingertips... saying “Here’s the church, there’s the steeple, open the doors to find the people.” Let’s open the doors and get outside the building and become the church!

Prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. (The Prayer of Saint Francis)

Thursday: Isaiah 2:2-4

Going Deeper: These words of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah are directed toward the temple in Jerusalem. They speak of God’s desire for the people of God to be a shining light on a hill. A tall tower standing as a beacon of truth proclaiming the ways of justice

and the path of God's desire for reconciliation. When I read these verses, I am drawn to verse 4... *"God will settle things fairly between nations. God will make things right between many people. They'll turn their swords into shovels, their spears into hoes. No more will nation fight nation; they won't play war anymore. Come, family of God, let's live in the light of God."* (The Message) What do you hear in these words from Isaiah? What is God telling us about the kingdom of God that Jesus, his Son, the Christ brings to us? Often these words have been used in protests, but they are not words of defiance. They are a call to us as the children of God to understand God's desire for peace and harmony. They are not wishful words, nor are they whimsical in their call. I hear these words as a challenge to be the people of God, to be the church of Jesus Christ that seeks to create safe spaces where people in conflict can come to find rest, and hope for a better tomorrow. These words are a challenge to us to become peacemakers; to be those who take the high road, as well as the road of self-sacrifice for the betterment and benefit of the community. A teaching from Meister Eckhart (a saint from the late 13th and early 14th cent.) captures the effort that is required of us if we are to live into this challenge of Isaiah... *"Wisdom consists in doing the next thing you have to do, doing it with your whole heart, and finding delight in doing it."* And lest we forget, our efforts will be undergirded by God's Spirit... *"God will show us the way God works so we can live the way we're made."* (Isaiah 2:3b The Message)

Prayer: "Who are you O God, and who am?" I lift my life to you my God, help me as a child of Christ the King to live in such a manner that I gain a better understand of who I am and who you call and challenge me to become. Thank you for always being there when I stumble and fall, help me now to be there for others as you have been there for me. "Who are you O God, and who am I?" Amen

(This short prayer of Saint Francis *"Who are you O God, and who am I?"* has been a grounding prayer for me. I use it to start my times of prayer, and when I find myself becoming flustered or frustrated to help ground myself and refocus so I may respond from a place of grace.)

Friday: Luke 19:33-44

Going Deeper: We know these words as the triumphal entry which are typically read during Holy Week. I wonder if we can hear them removed from that context. I wonder... can see yourself as one of Jesus' disciples among the crowd on that day celebrating his message and life that has touched yours so deeply, you will never be the same. I wonder if we can hear Jesus' lament captured in verses 41-44 freed from our timebound understanding and listen to what he might be saying to you and me today. If Jesus Christ is our King, are you trying to understand the meaning of his kingdom for your life and our world right now. His message is as vibrant today as it was when these words were recorded, they call us to be the church, not simply build a church. They invite us into a life lived with abundant grace, love, and mercy where God's peace is known both within our hearts and evident in our relationships. They call us to become the stones that cry out, that stand firm, and seek to love and accept others as Jesus did. Do we recognize God's gracious visitation in your life? Are you seeking ways or the path

that leads to and creates peace? This Sunday as we will celebrate Christ the King, I hope you will join your voice as we worship and rejoice together.

Prayer: *“Our Father who is in heaven, uphold the holiness of your name... Bring in your kingdom so your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven... Give us the bread we need for today... Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you... just as we also forgive those who have wronged us... And don’t lead us into temptation but rescue us from the evil one.”* (Matthew 6:9-13 CEB)