

## **Jeff's Reflection: August 23, 2020**

When Jesus introduced himself, he might have said, "I'm Jesus, but you can call me 'the son of man.'" – which seems to have been his preferred self-designation.

Biblical scholar Walter Wink said the term is a way of saying 'The Human One.' "I'm Jesus, but you can call me Human."

Which doesn't seem to tell us much. It's reminiscent of God's response to Moses. When Moses asked the voice in the burning bush what its name was, the voice replied with a word that translates as "I am who I am" – well, that's helpful!

So when Jesus said he was the Human One -a human being, he may not have been saying very little – or he may have been saying something very profound.

He may have been saying that God's presence is found in our humanity, that humans are not only made 'by' God but somehow are made 'of' God.

In today's story, Jesus asks the disciples a 'who am I?' question: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

Jesus asks the question in a particular location -in the district of Caesarea Philippi, in the northern area of Israel. As the name 'Caesarea' implies, the area was Caesar territory. About 50 years previously, Herod the Great had built a temple there to honour Caesar Augustus. Herod's son Philip later established a capital city there, in honour of the then emperor, Tiberius Caesar.

This is where Jesus asks, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" He asks them in this place that screams of the divinity of Caesar and the power of the Roman empire.

The disciples answer by telling Jesus that he reminds people of a variety of slightly odd religious superstars – people say you are John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of those other prophets who had some religious hits centuries ago.

By this time the disciples are likely apprehensive. In this place of Empire, Jesus is asking about his reputation as an anti-empire prophet...and now Jesus amps up their anxiety with a follow-up question: "BUT who do YOU say that I am?"

Simon Peter, as usual is the first to answer, perhaps hoping that a quick response means they can get out of here and back to some friendlier villages.

"You are the Messiah," says Peter. "You are the Son of the living God."

Jesus says that God has spoken through Peter, and that on this Peter who answers that 'Jesus' is God's anointed one, on this response Jesus can build an alternative community, a reborn world, a movement to overthrow every kingdom and power on earth.

Location, location, location...it matters because there in Caesarea Philippi, a place honouring Caesar as the Son of God, it was not only a statement of faith, but a statement of political subversion to name anyone other than Caesar as God's chosen one.

Location matters. 'Taking a knee' in the privacy of your living room while watching the pre-game rituals of a football game goes unnoticed. But when quarterback Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the playing of the USA's national anthem prior to an NFL game in 2016, he became the target of the anger of the nation's elected leader.

Kaepernick did not kneel to protest the anthem. He knelt to honour the vision of equality and just community that he believed is the vision and value of his nation. He could not stand and show pride in his nation's flag when his nation was oppressing, in his words, "black people and people of colour."

"Who do you say that I am? – here in Caesarea Philippi, here in the stadium when the anthem is played, here when human ones are being oppressed and dehumanized throughout the world. As soon as Peter answered he probably realized that his answer could get him into trouble.

Because if Peter's answer is not just words, but commitment, then his answer will take him with Jesus to Jerusalem, entering the city in a peaceful procession mocking Rome's imperial military processions, disrupting the temple marketplace and carrying a cross to Golgotha.

For North Americans today, answering that Jesus is the Son of God doesn't seem particularly threatening or controversial, unless we update our language to say that Jesus is Prime Minister, or President – Jesus is the one to whom we pledge our primary loyalty.

Martin Buber, a Jewish philosopher, said, "I do not believe in Jesus, but I believe with Jesus."

To believe with Jesus is to believe that there are more heights and depths to reality than we can explain or define; is to trust that at the heart of creation is the heart of a loving creator; is to see creation as sacred; is to see each person as an expression of God.

To believe with Jesus is to be one who offers healing, one who blesses, breaks and then distributes the things you have that can give life to others, it means forgiving those

who seem incapable of forgiving, it means learning to be peacemakers in order to confront the warmakers with creative non-violent ways of community, it means embodying a love divine.

“Who do YOU say that I am?” is a question to live in our hearts and minds until we know that the answer means accepting that each of us is a precious child of God, born to help create a world of peace and hope for all.

For on this rock, this answer, God may build a new creation. AMEN