

I suspect some of you have experienced “come to Jesus moments” in your life. Such moments are epiphanies in which one realizes the truth of a matter. A *come to Jesus moment* can be described as a sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something. Maybe your *come to Jesus moment* involved coming clean and admitting failures. Or, maybe it was realizing the true weight or impact of some situation. A *come to Jesus moment* can be a time of realization, a moment of decision, a moment of truth, a critical moment, or a moment in which one reassesses priorities. Quite often such moments in our lives mark a turning point and they are life-changing.

Today, when we meet up with Jesus and his band of twelve bumbling misfits, we hear about Peter experiencing a *come to Jesus moment*. Jesus has been traveling with his disciples, teaching, listening, and reaching out to people. There was a divine energy being released into the world through him and it included a passion for justice as well as healing and compassion for **all** people. He was going about the business of accepting the unacceptable and something was happening within the lives of Jesus and his disciples. I have to say, if one might compare these happenings to experiences in today’s culture, one could say Jesus was trending and going

viral because he was lighting up social media in his first-century world! In other words, things were really happening!

As Jesus and his band of misfits continue their travels they come into the district of Caesarea Philippi, a place of power and governmental authority where there would have been ample evidence of Roman rule and religion. There were multiple temples and statues of foreign gods. And, it is in this significant place that Jesus asks his followers, "What are people saying about me? Who do people say that I am?" The disciples then begin rattling off the results of the most recent public opinion poll: "A certain percentage of people say that you are John the Baptist, or at least like John the Baptist. And some think you're the second coming of the great prophet Elijah. And still others believe you're stern and austere like Jeremiah or one of the great prophets from our tradition. In other words, Jesus, people are beginning to put you on the Mount Rushmore of Jewish prophets! You're really making a name for yourself. You're really going places, Jesus. Isn't that fantastic?"

Well, Jesus **wasn't** taking a poll. Jesus was trying to take the disciples to a deeper place. And that's why he turned to them and asked a more penetrating question. He asked: "But who do **you** say that I am?" That's when ADHD Peter, always the first to react, always impetuous,

always ready with a quick answer, has a *come to Jesus moment* and blurts out, "You are the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Quite honestly, when we hear the rest of the gospel story we know he spoke these words without fully understanding what he was saying. But, Jesus responds saying, "By golly, you got it right! God bless you, Simon, son of Jonah! You didn't get that answer out of books or from teachers. My Father in heaven, God himself, let you in on this secret of who I really am. And now I'm going to tell you who you are, *really* are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out. And, that's not all. This community will have power. You will have complete and free access to God's kingdom, keys to open any door and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth, earth and heaven. A yes on earth is yes in heaven. A no on earth is no in heaven. In other words, this community has the power to interpret the law in light of new situations. The realm of heaven will concur with the church's interpretation." (*The Message*)

There can be no doubt that the Jesus of the Bible, particularly Jesus as described in the Gospel of Matthew, meant to build a community. There is no doubt he meant to leave behind a community of followers who lived

into the ways of God that he himself proclaimed and lived. In this reading from Matthew, the Greek word translated as *church* is *ekklesia*. This Greek word referred to the local political assembly, or the people "called out" to a town meeting. Matthew is the only gospel to use this word. So, Jesus, in referring to his followers as an *ekklesia*, probably meant the "called out" community of the faithful that would persevere in his teachings, as his influence lived on following the fate he felt awaited him.

As we ponder this story, it is important to remember and recognize Peter's confession when he experiences that *come to Jesus moment*. This is a powerful moment of recognition, yet, later Peter will go on to screw up mightily and completely misunderstand what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah. He will completely misunderstand what it means to confess Jesus as the Christ. He will later resist Jesus' intention to turn himself over to the authorities, and he will eventually deny and desert his Lord. But, **in this moment**, he confesses Jesus is the Christ.

In light of all that is going on in our world at this present time, we cannot help but ask ourselves, "Who do **we** say Jesus is and what does it mean to say that Jesus is the *Christ*?" For all of us, as we respond to these questions, there is a certain sense in which we too have a *come to Jesus moment*. More and more, as I respond to that question and confess Jesus

as the Christ, what makes sense to me is this: *Christ* is not just a person. Christ is not just a title. And, Christ is certainly not the last name of Jesus. No. *Christ* is a word that names the divine being, the divine energy that was released into the world through the life of Jesus. Just as stars explode and new planets are formed, so in the life of Jesus a certain kind of Christ energy was constellated and released into the world, into the cosmos, and this energy is still changing people. This is nothing less than the energy or presence of God. Compassion exploded into the world through the life of Jesus. Forgiveness, unconditional love and inexhaustible grace was released into the world through the life of Jesus. Creative, transforming and inspiring goodness was released into the world through the life of Jesus. So much so that I like to think of Jesus as a Christ-Burst--a burst of God energy that continues to shape the world one heart, one person, one community, and one situation at a time.

We who are part of a faith community are daily called to bear witness to that Christ-Burst wherever we live and move and have our being. We are called to live with the same passion and commitment as that early “called out” community to which Matthew’s gospel was written. We are being called – in our individual and communal lives – to daily confess Christ. We are called to confess the suffering Christ who always sided with

the vulnerable in both word and deed. Like Peter, we sometimes fall short, not living as deeply or truly into our confession as we should. At times, we even get confused or scared about what that confession really means. And, quite frankly, as we live together within this “called out” community, it can be a messy place. But, Jesus promises that he will build his church. God is at work through this “called out” community. And, guess what? We who are part of this community of whacky, messed-up, bumbling misfits continue to live out our *come to Jesus moments* as we feed the poor, house the homeless, care for the sick and dying, mentor and support the young in their faith journeys, walk with people through the challenges and trials of life, advocate for the vulnerable and forgotten, work for justice and peace, and reach out to connect to and become engaged with this needy world by sharing the gracious love of God in Christ.