

A Sermon for 17th Sunday after Pentecost

September 15, 2024



Rev. Barbara Bond

New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH

Click Here for today's Readings:

[Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

Mark 8:27-38

At the name of Jesus

In 1947, when I was two years old, my parents and I left a cultured lovely city, Washington DC, and moved to a muddy town in East Tennessee named Oak Ridge. It already had some notoriety because of the part it had played in building the atomic bomb. It was muddy because it was a new installation, carved out of the Appalachian Mountains. Most of the adults were scientists, including my father, from other parts of the country. Oak Ridge was surrounded by rural towns where the educational level was not very high. In the early 1950s, television arrived. Televised programming was rather sparse in those days, and so the neighboring communities made up their own broadcasts. I remember Knoxville would broad Gospel Hour, featuring four men nicely dressed in suits and singing their hearts out, in four-part harmony, with lots of mention of Jesus. This was not the kind of music I was used to, and I thought it was funny.

From the age of six, I attended St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. The parishioners built the church around 1950. One of the parishioners was Dr. William Pollard, a nuclear physicist who became so involved that he answered a call to ministry and was ordained an Episcopal priest. This impressed me. If a nuclear physicist could believe in God, so could I.

Meanwhile, those television shows continued with Gospel music and eventually developed into the Oak Ridge Boys. In our Episcopal Church, the music was standard hymns, some chanting, and lots of Johann Sebastian Bach. I was very conscious of the difference of expression between Episcopalians and the Jesus folks.

See, in that time period, many people who regarded themselves as sophisticated did not utter the name of Jesus. It seemed hokey somehow. Instead they said Jesus Christ, or just Christ. Much classier.

But, ya know, Christ is not Jesus's last name. Jesus didn't have a last name. He was known as Jesus of Nazareth, and if further identification was needed, he would be named the son of Joseph the carpenter, and Mary.

The designation of Christ meant that this Jesus was anointed. Sometimes the Gospels refer to him as Jesus the Christ, Jesus the anointed one.

We have a scene in today's Gospel from Mark where Jesus and his disciples are quibbling a bit over his name. Jesus gives them a pop quiz, asking who people say he is. The disciples throw out some possibilities – John the Baptist, Elijah, other prophets. But Jesus zeros in on his own disciples and asks, "But who do you say that I am?"

That's always the question, isn't it? Who do we, you and I, who do we say that Jesus is? There are lots of choices in the oratorio, Messiah: Wonderful! Counselor! The ever lasting Father! The King of peace!

But Peter gives a very simple answer: "You are the Messiah." Even though this is the correct answer, Jesus would rather it were not bandied about. He tells his followers what it means to be the Messiah – not being a big military hero, but rather a tortured soul who will undergo great suffering, be rejected by elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And by the way, the same thing will happen to you guys too. This is not the life the disciples thought they had signed up for, and Peter wanted out. Jesus rebuked Peter and gave a more explicit description of their lives as his followers. It sounded very difficult. So that is what it means to be a follower of Jesus. It doesn't mean dressing up in fine clothes and collecting great wealth. In fact, it means just the opposite – take up your cross and follow Jesus.

Yes, we should call him by name, Jesus, and describe his role in the heavenly story with modifiers like Christ and Messiah. But basically, we should not be ashamed to call him by name and declare him the Lord of our lives. All that pussy-footing I did in my early years, afraid to say the name of Jesus – why? Let's claim our leader. Who do you say he is? JESUS! We can shout it out with the Gospel singers, we can sing it out in beautiful hymns and more folksy hymns, but it is all the same: JESUS!

Here are the words to a wonderful hymn, Number 435. Perhaps you would like to read it with me, the verses 1, 2 and 4. Number 435.

At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow,
every tongue confesses him King of glory now.

'tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season, to receive a Name
From the lips of sinners, unto who he came,
Faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious, when from death he passed

Name him, Christians, name him, with love strong as death,
Name with awe and wonder and with batted breath;
He is God the Savior, he is Christ the Lord,
Ever to be worshiped, trusted, and adored.