

15 Pent B  
Wis. 7:26-8:1  
James 3:1-12  
Mark 8:27-38

One thing my husband and I don't have in common is a love for going to the movies. He loves to go and it doesn't matter if he knows the movie is going to be bad, he'll go because he likes to "get lost in the story" as he says. I on the other hand think seeing a movie is the biggest waste of time imaginable. I will only go if I know the film has had a good write up and it doesn't fit the Hollywood mold. Because I can't stand the fact that in 99 percent of movies I see -My perception of what will happen, happens. I can tell you the ending and the whole plot line within 5 minutes of the opening credits. Because the characters always fit into our society's perceived notion of people. The macho man whose family has been victimized, the cute older sister who has a rebellious even cuter younger sister, the reluctant super hero who HAS to save the world, the lonely young woman whose only mission in life is to find the right man.

I just can't stand the fact that Hollywood instigates our perceptions of people and what we expect they should be. I've heard Maya Angelou speak about this and she tells other people who want her to act or speak in a certain way "Don't should on me." !

And that's what I hear Jesus saying to Peter this morning. Peter, and all the disciples for that matter, had a perception of whom and what the long awaited Messiah should be. Despite seeing and hearing Jesus in action-they still expected Jesus, in the mold of their Jewish tradition (their Scriptures and rabbinic teachings), to be a warrior, a fighter and a man who would bring wrath and destruction on the enemies of the house of Israel. He was to be a kingly Messianic character who would reign extravagantly. Jesus knew what the public's perception of him was. But here he asks them personally. He wants them to throw away their perceptions and expectations of him and answer honestly, from the heart.

He says "yes, I know the crowds think I am Elijah, or John, or an ancient prophet but who do YOU think I am.?"

I think I learned in a communications class in college that one's perception is 90% of her or his reality. Meaning what I assume you are is what you are, in my world. And I wonder if I would have said the same thing as the disciples. I have a preconceived notion about who Jesus is. It is a combination of childhood imagination, Sunday School, life experiences and serious Biblical study. But sometimes I get it wrong. Sometimes I think Jesus SHOULD be over here doing this, when he is apparently over there doing something else and then I realize well, there I go again missing Jesus in the midst of us because of my own faults, because I should on him again.

And I think we all are like the disciples and Peter. Because of traditions, societal labels and stereotypes we believe we know a person just by who we think they are. And if you doubt this let me ask you some questions. What type of person do you picture when I say "Northerner", what type of person do you picture when I say

Southerner, what type of person do you picture when I say “Reverend”, or bookkeeper, or Sunday School teacher, lawyer, custodian, cook, librarian, roofer, dishwasher, homeless, drug addict, white, black, republican, democrat,---- Messiah? Who do you say they are? And here is where we get rebuked- here is where Jesus tells us to get out of his way - When we put our perceived wisdom before Jesus’ true wisdom. How often do we think we know more about a person than God does? How often do we direct our sinful prejudice towards someone before we get to know their true character. Jesus tells us “You have no idea how God works! When we determine our human ways are Gods ways and expect people to act according to our “shoulds” we’re acting against God. Along with Peter’s confession I confess sympathy with Peter, because it is a difficult thing to live up to a professed faith when that faith asks us to trust Jesus when we have a far superior alternate plan in mind.

Thank our gracious God that Jesus’ ways are not our ways. That Our Lord and Messiah did not fit the mold of the traditional war-

rior Savior. Instead he broke the mold, he defied labels, he surpassed our human preconceptions and became our suffering, servant savior who died and rose again for us. He offered himself on the cross to break the hold of sin. He became a new thing -something so good that nobody could predict or imagine it. If we trust in God and the Christ in each other, if we see a person first for who they truly are instead of what we want them to be -then we open our hearts and our lives to the workings of Jesus and the Holy Spirit and we can surpass any label or mold. -Then we allow the wisdom of God not our sin of human perceptions to lead us. The question for us today is which one -God's wisdom or ours, will we follow?