

Interactive lesson



*picture on left from MMMS collection;
picture on right from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/wood-bird-summer-garden-18034956/>,
right photo credit: Merve ÇAKIR*

What kind of bird is pictured on the left?

What kind of bird is pictured on the right?

What is the difference between a pigeon and a dove?

Scientifically, there is no difference between a pigeon and a dove. Commonly, people categorize them as doves being slightly smaller than pigeons and having more fan to their tailfeathers.

What do we associate with a bird called a dove?

What do we associate with a bird called a pigeon?

Do we treat the birds differently? -

The same bird may be treated very differently depending on what we call it. What about with people?

Which would you rather meet, an exotic newcomer from a country with a rich cultural history, or an odd-looking immigrant who does not know our ways?

What we call things affects our perception of them as well as how others may perceive them. What kinds of things does the media call the church, Jesus, God?

"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

What do you proclaim Jesus to be?

Which voices are louder?

In a world where “Poisoning Pigeons in the Park” was a popular song, how do we help people to see the doves of promise rather than the pesky pigeons of our faith?

The names by which we call people and things makes a difference in how we treat them. As I read the Gospel lesson, I want you to think about what [the different names people called Jesus] meant for how they received Him in their hearts and as a culture.

Gospel lesson

Prior this reading, Jesus had fed four thousand men plus women & children, then had Sadducees and Pharisees asking Him for a sign. Jesus rebuked them for not interpreting the signs He had already done. As they traveled away from there, Jesus warned the disciples to beware the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees; they took His words literally until He clarified that He meant their teachings.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/qnpi-076-blind-beggar/>

Matthew 16:13-20

NRSV

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but

others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Word of God, Come Down on Earth">

UMH #182>

Message: Who Do You Say?



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-journey-begins/thirteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/thirteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Wondrous Word of truth and life,
as we take time now to further consider today's
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may call your truth more freely and draw
[ourselves and others] closer to life in You. Amen.

In a new series as disciples of Jesus, "The Journey Begins," this week with the question: "Who Do You Say?"

"Out of nowhere, it seemed, as they traveled along, Jesus asked his disciples a question of identity. "Who do you say that I am?" It's a question we must answer again and again as we seek to become disciples of Jesus Christ."

In the 2022 July newsletter, I shared this story. It was told by a man named Steve, about when he went shopping and encountered a mentally challenged boy who had been briefly separated from his mother.

Steve spoke kindly to the boy, learning that his name was Denny. For several minutes they spoke about summer, bicycles, and school, until Denny abruptly turned and went toward the toys section.

Steve was then approached by Denny's mother, who had

been watching them. She thanked him, saying that most people wouldn't even look at Denny, much less talk to him.



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/extreme-close-up-shot-of-a-blue-rose-in-bloom-7050671/>; photo credit: Nefeli Andriopoulou

Steve told her it was his pleasure; then, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he said, "There are plenty of red, yellow, and pink roses in God's Garden; however, "Blue Roses" are very rare and should be appreciated for their beauty and distinctiveness. You see, Denny is a Blue Rose and if someone doesn't stop and smell that rose with their heart and touch that rose with their kindness, then they've missed a blessing from God."

Denny's mother was silent for a second, then with a tear in her eye she asked, "Who are you?" Without thinking, he said, "Oh, I'm probably just a dandelion, but I sure love living in God's garden." She reached out, squeezed his hand and said, "God bless you!" and then he had tears in his eyes.

What a change in the way people are treated just because of how they are seen by others! All through history we can pull examples of that.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/yo-moses1/>

We see it in the Old Testament story today, of that “surfin’ baby” Moses. When called an Israelite, he was to be summarily drowned. When called the son of Pharoah’s daughter – that is, Egyptian – he was to be well-nurtured and protected. In both cases, he was a male infant whose mother loved him. He went from being viewed as a pigeon – one of a verminous multitude – to being viewed as a dove, a blessing sent from heaven.

Why do we allow anyone to be mistreated just because of what they are called? Why do we buy into the myth that they – or we – are anything less than a cherished child of God?

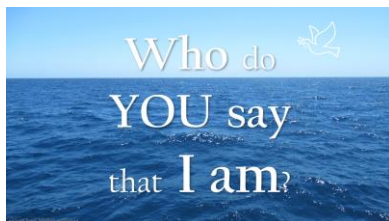
Did we not just hear today Paul telling the Romans to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God”? That we ourselves are the acceptable sacrificial gift we give to God, each serving in our unique ways with the diversity that makes each of us so special?

After calling Denny a blue rose, Steve called himself an old dandelion (presumably to indicate he was no one of note), but we just spoke a few weeks ago about

all the uses there are for dandelions. If God finds us acceptable, how dare we belittle ourselves? Or others whom God loves?

For that matter, why do we so often enable society's disparaging of our faith, refusing to speak about it publicly? No wonder so many people scoff at the church and act like they are gods, pushing their judgements onto others without understanding how much they are hurting even those they try to help!

Fundamentally, our outlook on others depends upon how we view God. Amidst the chaotic publicity of this world, Jesus asks us, "But who do you say that I am?"



picture from MMMS collection

At the time of today's Gospel reading, the people of the areas where Jesus ministered seemed to relate to Him as fully human, albeit called or sent by God like the great Old Testament prophets were. The people did not see that God was calling them into an even closer and more blessed relationship with their Creator than being Covenant people afforded them.

Simon Peter, son of a fisherman, realized it first - before any of the temple scholars and leaders. He saw that Jesus was the Son of the living God. In saying so, he became a blue rose in the garden of Israelite

faith, a dove amidst all the pigeons.

Opening our hearts to God transforms us out of the mundane into something beautiful. The more society opens up to a relationship with God, the better off everyone is.

Sin blocks us from knowing God. Sin drives people into striving for themselves, usually at the expense of others, and preventing the greater good that can come from the pooling of resources and gifts. Sin drives us to the lowest common denominator, dragging us down instead of raising us up to our best.

God gives us so much better than that through our relationship with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. By knowing God, we experience love in a fundamental way within our hearts. We understand that it is good to strive for the benefit of all, to cherish our diversity, that in pooling our resources and unique gifts we will reach heights that we cannot reach by ourselves.

It is not just a general “we are part of something bigger than ourselves.” It is God’s love that drives us to identify the blue roses and the doves, to have greater bonds with one another.

Your naming something defines how you relate to it, and your relationship imbues the name with meaning.

So who do you say that Jesus is?



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-journey-begins/thirteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/thirteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

This week, I want you to consider something or someone that you demean by what you call them. What other names might you apply? Like gas station attendants being called petroleum distribution engineers, what can you call the person or thing that changes your mindset to something more positive and respectful?

Try applying those new names and see what changes in how much of a blessing you receive from the people or things you previously demeaned. If nothing else, you may be more grateful to God for the gifts in your life – and living for Jesus unlocks the kingdom of heaven for the glory of God to be known on earth.

