

**Sermon Notes – September 15, 2024**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. Mark 8: 27-38**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“Who Do You Say That I Am?”**

Today's readings warn us to use our words well, since by them we both bless God and yet curse our neighbor; or simply, confess Jesus' significance and yet oppose Him.

Our first reading was originally written not about Jesus, but about an unidentified servant central to four “Servant Songs” (Isa.42: 1-9, 49: 6; 50: 4,-11; 53: 12). Most readers identify the servant as Israel in its experiences of exile. Over time, however, Christians identified the servant with Jesus (Matt. 8: 17; Acts 8: 32-33; 1 Peter 2: 24-25). The servant entrusts his vindication to God, just as Jesus does in Mark's narrative.

James delivers a stinging and highly rhetorical critique of rash speech - a prominent concern expressed by leaders in early Christian communities. The passage magnifies the destructive capacity of human speech, as it can corrupt us and also inflame the world with the fire of hell (Greek, *Gehenna*). At issue is how human speech may bless God and yet curse people who bear His image (see Gen. 1: 27; 9: 6). The overall lesson is the virtue of restraining destructive speech.

Our gospel reading is a watershed for Mark's gospel, shifting towards the cross and away from Jesus' deeds of power. Caesarea Philippi is a city-state on the edge of Gentile territory, further located from Jerusalem than the places of most events in Mark. The disciples respond with conventional answers to Jesus' first question (Mark 6: 14-15). In this city, Peter becomes the first person to confess Jesus as the Messiah. In response, Jesus issues His first prophecy ( 8: 31, 9: 31, 33-34), making it clear the kind of Messiah He will be. Jewish messianic beliefs were not monolithic but diffuse, periodic, and contextual. That said, Peter clearly had assumptions that Jesus disappoints. The Greek word for “Messiah” is “Christ” (*Christos*), which is neither Jesus' last name nor a title per se, but an ascription of honor (like Caesar *Augustus*)..

Whereas Peter rebukes Jesus privately, Jesus rebukes Peter publicly. The language “Satan” highlights the antagonistic role Peter assumes, albeit unknowingly. The entire interaction is a teaching moment. Jesus

associates following Him with self-denial, public shame and even loss of life. These traits are not virtues in themselves, but by-products of following Jesus. To follow Jesus is to relinquish control and to be subject to worldly dishonor. In our context, such dishonor may not transpire in the same way.

Today we are invited to ponder how we, by our words and our deeds, confess Jesus as Messiah and His cross as our way of life.