Today we recall one of the main scenes in the whole Gospel. It’s like the turning point in a good story. The true identity of the main character is revealed. While we might have heard this Gospel reading many times before, let’s try to take a fresh look at it and think about what’s going on.

The search for personal identity is important to each of us. We spend our lifetime asking ourselves who we really are. Part of that quest for understanding includes the question of where we came from. Who are our parents? Who are our distant ancestors? The search for genealogical data has become a national preoccupation these days. It’s rooted in a belief that if we know where or from whom we originated, we’ll discover important information about our own personal identity. So it’s interesting how the question of Jesus’ true identity resolves itself.

A Gospel Word for the Home
Matthew 16:13-20

The setting for today’s Gospel reading is interesting. It’s near the major Roman settlement of Caesarea Philippi, which was named after two famous Roman emperors. It’s as if this Gospel is set on a world stage. What’s being addressed concerns the whole cosmos. Jesus chose this place to ask his disciples the Big Question. Who do they think he really is? And after a few opinions were aired, Jesus turns to Peter for his view. The words are brief and to the point. Furthermore, they are exactly correct. Peter says that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. No doubt those assembled perked up. This was no small statement from Peter.

The Jews were longing for a Messiah, one sent by God to save them. They were not experiencing good times. They were more or less enslaved to the occupying force of the distant empire of Rome. The Romans persecuted them, and the Romans had already killed many Jews just because they were Jews. So the words of Jesus not only had religious significance, but they also had political ramifications. They were both wonderful and dangerous words.

Peter’s act of confessing that Jesus was the Son of the Living God was a remarkable statement of faith. For starters, it meant that Peter experienced Jesus as a totally unique and remarkable person, unlike anyone who ever was or will be. In a way he is suggesting: “If anyone wants to know what God is like, look at Jesus. Listen to what he says. Notice what he does.” These are direct indicators of the nature of God. That is remarkable!
Parent Survival

While Jesus was not a parent himself (despite the speculations in pop culture novels) he was a son of a parent while living with us on earth. In fact, he spent most of his life living in an ordinary family in Nazareth. Why is that good to know? It’s good to know because he really participated in human relationships like most of us do. He understands us. That’s one reason why we can go to him for both understanding and help. Although on some days it may feel like it, we are not alone.

So, go to Jesus in prayer. Sometimes we are at wits end and we desperately need advice or help from others. To borrow a phrase from the business world, “Jesus has connections.” He is right at the center of great power. He was sent to us to let us know that our concerns are also his. Maybe we need to take more advantage of that “leverage.”

by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Car or Meal Talk

We all have ideas and images of Jesus. Take some time to ask others in your family: Who do you think Jesus is? Explore what each one says.

One-Line Prayer

Jesus, our friend and brother, Be with us, especially during times when we feel alone and worried. Amen.