

**Who do you say that I am?** It's a question of authority that comes up **several times** in scripture. It's sometimes asked by **Jesus** of his **followers**. "Who do **the people** say that I am? But who do you say that I am?" Today, this question is being asked **of Jesus** by the **religious authorities in Jerusalem**. "Who do you say that you **are**? By **what authority** are you doing these things, and **who gave you this authority**?" In effect, "**Who do you think you are?**" As is **so often** the case in scripture, we've **got to** consider **the setting** if we're going to get the **full impact** of the **passage in question**. Jesus has been **steadily** working his way toward **Jerusalem**, toward the **death on a cross** that he has predicted. Now he has **entered the city**, with all the **pomp of Palm Sunday**. He has **angrily** tossed over the tables of the **money-changers**, and now he has **set up shop** and begun to teach.

Is it **any wonder** that the chief priests and elders want to know the answer to these questions, "By what **authority** are you **doing** these things, and **who gave you** this authority?" **Who do you think you are?** When we think about it, it actually seems like a **fair question!** After all, these are the people who **are** in charge – these are the people who **are** in authority! **What right** does Jesus have to **do** these things? Well, if Jesus is **anything**, he is an **extremely gifted debater!** Just as he **turned over the tables** of the **money-changers**, he **turns the tables** on these '**Holy Men!**' He corners them with a **question of his own** about authority, a question that gives them **no easy out** – then he tells today's **puzzling parable** about a **father** and **two sons**. One son says he's going to **do** something and **doesn't**; the other says he's **not going** to do something and **does!** Let's just say that '**actions speak louder than words**', and leave it **at that!**

But today, let's go back to that reading we heard from the **Apostle Paul** in his letter to the **Philippians**. Perhaps we may get a sense of **who Jesus is**, and by **whose authority** he **speaks and acts**. And when I say let's go back, **I mean it literally!** This man **Paul from Tarsus** was a **forerunner** of our faith. We might say he was **the** forerunner of our faith. Sometime around the year **60**, Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, a **Christian community** that **he founded**. That's about **30 years** after **Christ's death**, and at least **10 years before any** of the gospel accounts **were written!** Even today, that's **hard for me to get into my head**. Paul's letters were written a **decade or more before** any of the gospels of **Matthew, Mark, Luke or John!** St. Paul's letters are among the **earliest** writings about Jesus.

The letter to the Philippians was written by Paul during one of his **several terms in prison**. And remember, Paul's **allegiance to Christ** comes **after** he spent years **persecuting the very earliest of Christians**. His plea to the **community at Philippi** is that they '**seek the mind of Christ**'. It's as though Paul is **speaking to us** today: "If then there is **any encouragement** in Christ, any **consolation** from love, any **sharing in the Spirit**, any **compassion** and **sympathy**, make **my joy** complete: be of the **same mind**, having the **same love**, being in full accord and of **one mind**."

Do **nothing** from **selfish ambition or conceit**, but in **humility** regard others as **better than yourselves**. Let each of you look not to your **own interests**, but to the interests of **others**. Let the **same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus!** **Minding Christ** – that was the

title of one of my **last courses** at the seminary – a course on Christian ethics taught by **Dr. John Hoffmeyer**. Dr. Hoffmeyer is a brilliant theologian, and I count myself **blessed** to have taken courses from him. **Minding Christ** -- this is not minding Christ as in, **“Now you mind me young man!”** Rather, it is **seeking the mind of Christ**. In essence, answering the question – **“Who do you say that I am?”**

What a **timely message** Paul gives his followers of **any age**— his purpose is to give a **pattern of thinking and living** for the believers in Philippi – one **grounded** in the **way of Jesus**; but he might as well be speaking with us **21<sup>st</sup> century** followers of Christ. The **appeal? Unity and Humility!** You know, it seems that **we all want to put our own spin on things**. That’s our right in this country, **isn’t it?** As Americans we **applaud individual expression of ideas**. **Rugged Individualism** is something we’ve come to take **great pride in!** But Paul urges **community unity** alongside **individual humility!** “Make my joy complete – be of the **same mind**, having the **same love**, being in **full accord** and of **one mind**.” The emphasis on **unity** is **hard to miss**. Along with **unity**, Paul appeals for **humility**. Believers are to be characterized not by **“selfish ambition or conceit,”** but by **“humility.”** This means **caring for others** and their **interests** more **highly** than for our **own concerns!** And Christ humbled himself to the **point of crucifixion!** This way of seeking the **mind of Christ** stands in **stark contrast** to the **honor-seeking** that prevailed among **Roman aristocrats**. Paul does not recommend a **traditional course of honor** -- the way of **upward mobility and aspiration** -- but a course of **downward mobility**: the way of **relinquishment** and of **honoring others**, seen foremost in the **life of Christ**. In living out this **humble life**, which seems **counterintuitive** to the culture of Jesus’ day (**and counterintuitive to our culture**), Jesus is **ultimately** proclaimed **“Lord” of all, superior** to those who have power **as the world sees it**.

“Therefore God also **highly exalted him** and gave him the name that is **above every name**, so that at the name of Jesus **every knee should bend**, in **heaven and on earth and under the earth**, and **every tongue** should confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of **God the Father**.” Paul then encourages the community to be **obedient** to the **mind of Christ** by **“working out our own salvation with fear and trembling”** This doesn’t mean that we can work to **obtain salvation** – **that is already won for us by Christ!** But how we respond in the **here and now** to what Christ has **done for us**, how we live out that salvation in the world – that’s a matter of **obedience to his will**. **Obedience, humility, and public witness** -- “for it is **God** who is at work **in you**, enabling you both **to will** and **to work** for **God’s good pleasure**.”

In our culture, Evangelical Christians are fond of asking, **“Do you know the Lord?”** That’s usually my cue to find an excuse to exit the conversation. But if the question is **natural and authentic** – if it’s not a **judgment statement** in disguise, it really is at the core of our reading today from Philippians.

My encouragement for all of us, **myself included**, is to know the Lord – to be **mindful** of the way Christ would have us **live out our obedience**, our **humility**, and our **public witness** to Him -- to be able to respond authentically to his question, **“Who do you say that I am?”** Amen.