



## *Take Up Your Cross and Follow*

*Mark 8:27-38*

*"Who do people say I am?"*

*They replied, "Some say John the Baptist;  
others say Elijah;  
and still others, one of the prophets."*

*"But what about you?" he asked. "*

*Who do you say I am?"*

*Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."*

*September 13, 2015*

## **Thought for the Week**

Scriptures: Isaiah 50:4-9 • James 2: 14-18 • Mark 8: 27-35

How many times in your life have you asked God for a blessing, insight into a problem, help with your homework or project, help with understanding why someone we knew acted the way they did. I sure we have all done this in one form or another. Well, here's another perspective that you should consider when you are about to ask God for something. Here's Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's reflection on self-esteem. "Never once in my life did I ask God for wisdom, power or fame. I asked for wonder and he gave it to me."

It has often seemed to me that we, or most of us at least, are seriously over concerned with self-image, about what people think of us or what people are saying about us. I imagine we would like to be well perceived by those who know us, or, if we happen to be a public figure (politicians), that everybody speak well of us.

But the question is this: does it really make any difference whether people speak well of us or not? If each of us is determined to live each day in a spirit of honesty and integrity, does it make any difference? Perhaps we are more concerned about reputation than about character. Reputation is what we would like others think of us. Character is what God thinks of us.

That brings us to the question of self-assurance as it appears in the scriptures. Of all the writers in the Hebrew Bible whom we could describe as self-assured, the prophets always stand in first place. Indeed, I'm sure their listeners must often have rolled their eyes when the prophets spoke as though God Himself were speaking. Here is a short quote or two from the prophet Isaiah: "The Lord is my help; I am not disgraced. I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame. See, the Lord God is my help; who will prove me wrong?" That is what Jewish writers would call chutzpah or impudence. Of course, the prophets spoke with the deep conviction that they did, they spoke with the support of God. Who could question that?

The gospel also addresses the very question we are dealing with: Jesus asks his disciples: "Who do people say that I am, and who do you say that I am? It seems fairly certain to me that Jesus did not really care what people thought of him. He was already steadfastly determined of his vocation and

what it would involve, namely, suffering and death. It was to this end that he had begun his preaching of God's kingdom. It was the vocation God had called him to that ultimately counted. He was not about to change his mind about that even though Peter thought it a bit outlandish that Jesus chose to die for his vision of God's kingdom.

So that brings us back to the original question about our own vision of life and the role we play in this world. Obviously, we all need to believe in something that is critical to our life; we need to stand firmly for something. True, we may often fail to see and understand all the elements of an issue or some action but the important thing is that we continue to seek and change when we find some new avenue to truth on our life's journey.

Let me close with a quote from E.E. Cummings the poet that seems to sound so much like the quote from Rabbi Abraham Heschel: "Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight or any experience that reveals the human spirit."

*Happy Birthday Kathy (9/17) & Laurie (9/18)*

## **Prayer for Peace - Albania**

God of all, we praise you. We give thanks for this time to remember your goodness, your loving care, your guidance, and your plan for creation to be at peace.

Forgive us for not remembering your peace and being guilty of acts and thoughts that do not promote the peace and mission of Christ.

We uphold for your blessing of peace the nation of Albania. Guide their leaders and people as they strive to find peaceful resolution to tensions in their country. Bless all who are not bound by political borders but see all neighbors as brothers and sisters.

We pray for the needs and concerns of those gathered here. May your spirit of love and peace embrace all.

May your name be praised, O God of all creation. Amen.

## **Stewardship Thought**

Good, sound Financial Stewardship should be about a proportion of your financial resources, not an amount. Take your current donation, and divide it by your income, and that tells you the percentage, or proportion, of your giving. For example, if you're giving \$3,000/year, and your income \$60,000/year, you are offering 5% in gratitude to God. Does the proportion you give honor to your talents that God has blessed you with? It's for you to say "yes" or "no" to that.

Maybe you are giving 2%. Prayerfully consider 3%. Make the journey to the tithe, or 10%, which, we know, is "the biblical standard," but that's a little too legalistic for me. We all live complex financial lives, and when it comes to percentages, "one size does not fit all."

Still, I urge everyone to calculate the percentage. To do so is an important spiritual practice. Truly, when we give a portion of what we have, rather than an amount, much of the financial anxiety of pledging dissipates.