

A fourth-grade teacher was trying to give her students a lesson in logic – how one thing reasonable follows from something else. “Here is the situation,” she said. “A man was standing up in a boat in the middle of a river, fishing .“He loses his balance, falls into the river, and begins splashing around and yelling for help. “His wife hears the commotion, knows he can’t swim, so she runs down to the bank. “Why does she run to the bank?”, the teacher asked.” Angie raised her hand and said: “Maybe to make a deposit?” Angie will need some help with her reasoning skills . . . Today, the disciples are faced with a similar situation: having the teacher ask a very important question.

Like good students, they want to seem intelligent – so they blurt out answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah – not necessarily the answer Jesus is after – but an answer none- the -less. That is, until one of Jesus’ All Stars – Simon Peter – shouts out an answer that is both correct and pretty insightful . . . *only* to follow it up by sticking his foot in his mouth with a huge blunder – which we won’t hear about until next week. But as for Peter’s correct and pretty insightful answer – he says: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And before Peter can pat himself on the back for being a good student – Jesus points out that he did not come up with this on his own – but it had been revealed to him by God the Father.

Notice Jesus does not ask the Apostles to tell him about himself – to which they could have said: you’re the one who healed the Canaanite woman’s daughter; you’re the one who walked on water; you’re the one who took Peter, James, and John up the mountain;> you’re the one who tells good stories about the kingdom of heaven – like it being a buried treasure, or a pearl of great price. . . No, Jesus doesn’t say tell me about who I am – but asks – *who do you say that I am*. . . Because there is a big difference between knowing about someone – and knowing who they are: one answer comes from the head – the other answer comes from the heart.

If we are going to be the disciples Jesus calls us to be – then we can’t just know about Jesus – give a head answer about him: born of the Father before all ages. God from God. Light from Light. True God from true God. Begotten not made – as important as head answers are: *We have to know what we believe*. But we also have to *know who Jesus is* . . . in our hearts.

I think Pope Benedict put this bluntly when he once said: “Being a Christian is not the result of ethical choices or lofty ideals – but our encounter with a person: Jesus Christ, who is the way the truth and the life.”

Unless we really know Jesus in our hearts - unless we are truly in relationship with him – talk with him, share our innermost thoughts with him, share the things we wish to hide from – and the things we wish to hide from others – share our hopes, dreams, and desires – then when the going gets rough, we will quickly give into what everyone else is thinking, doing, or saying – and leave Jesus behind. . . That is what’s going to happen to Peter – as much as he says he knows Jesus – he is going to abandon him as soon as next week’s Gospel. He will continue to stumble and fall many times – but eventually he will get it right. He may abandon Jesus – but Jesus never abandons him – and Jesus will never abandon us: he will give us a *lifetime*- to get it right.

By the way, there is a bit more to Pope Benedict’s quote: “Being a Christian is not the result of ethical choices or lofty ideals – but our encounter with a person: Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life **who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction**.

Once we truly know who Jesus is – then it effects the way we live our lives: our actions will speak louder than our words. So yes, Peter will continue to stumble and fall – but in the end – he expends his life – uses his gifts and talents – to tirelessly proclaim the kingdom of God -- eventually laying down his life for Jesus – being crucified – upside down, because he thought he was not worthy to die in the same way Jesus did. . . . When we truly know Jesus – we live our lives proclaiming our belief.

As Pope Francis recently said: “Let’s ask ourselves if we are parlor Christians --who love to chat about what we believe and how things are going in the Church and the world, but always playing it safe --- “Or if we are truly Apostles – on the go, who confess Jesus with our lives because we hold him in our hearts. Those who confess Jesus know that they are not simply to offer opinions – but to offer their very lives.

“They know they are not to believe half-heartedly, but to be ‘on fire’ with love. They know that they cannot just ‘tread water’ or take the easy way out, but have to risk putting out into the deep, daily renewing their self-offering.

“Those who confess their faith in Jesus do as Peter did: they follow him to the end – not just part of the way, but to the very end. They also follow the Lord along his way, not their own way.

“**His way** is that of new life, of joy and of resurrection; it is also the way that passes through the cross and persecution.” [Pope Francis addressing new archbishops at the reception of their palliums]

And that last part –about the cross and persecution – is what we will see that Peter still has issues with. . . – for now.

Before we leave today – in the quiet of our hearts, not in our heads – let’s answer two questions:

Who do I say Jesus is for me?

And perhaps, then, most importantly: -what difference is that going to make to me today and for the coming week?