

But who do you say Jesus is?

Bible reference for sermon: Matthew 16:13-20

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.

Jesus asks the question "who do you say that I am?"

What's your answer?

Well at the end of this sermon OUR answer will be in the words of Nicene Creed

Did you hear the recent controversy in the media when the current American Vice President, who became a Roman Catholic Christian in 2019, mentioned his views on the Nicene Creed?

He appeared on a TV talkback show to promote his book "Communion: Finding my way back to the faith" where he criticised what are known as 'In this House' yard signs in



American front yards which listed progressive statements, say welcoming refugees for example. Vice President argued that whilst these signs resembled the Nicene Creed in one sense, they replaced fundamental Christian tenets with political ideals and claims.

Well, there was something of a backlash to his comments to say the least. Many leading Catholics most notably Father James Martin who had been appointed by Pope Francis criticised Vance arguing that it was in fact his comments that politicised fundamental Christian teachings and completely overlooked the fact that Catholic Social Teaching aligns with core tenets of charity and welcoming the stranger.

How does it get so complex?

"What about you?"

Who do you say that I am?"

Jesus' question "But who do you say that I am?" doesn't sound so complex does it?

But already we hear that while he was on the earth among people, that there were different answers, different responses, squabbles...

"Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets"

Down through the centuries there have been controversies about Jesus and his nature as both true God and true human which have led the church at the time, to come together in Synod to discuss and agree upon and to make statements of faith which we use today such as the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds.

In services with Holy Communion, we generally confess our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed after the sermon. I remind you that the rhythm of sound evangelical Lutheran worship is that God works through his Word and that we respond.

The Creed then is both our response to the Word, to God who gives us that Word, and to Jesus who asks us -, And what of you? Who do say that I am?

So, do you know the story of the Nicene Creed?

You can find out for yourself online by googling Nicene Creed history or similar.

1. The Council of Nicaea (325 AD)

The First Council of Nicaea was convened by Roman Emperor Constantine I.

(NOTE you need to know that it was Constantine who in 313AD ordered the full restitution of confiscated and ensuring equal rights under the law to Christians who had been persecuted to this point under Diocletian's persecution of Christians.)

This allowed Christians to exist and to practice their beliefs in the Holy Roman Empire. Constantine just two years after issuing this edict ordered a council meeting to be held in Nicaea to resolve a massive theological controversy threatening to fracture the Roman Empire. A presbyter named Arius from Alexandria in Egypt, proposed that Jesus, as the Son of God, was a created being and therefore subordinate to God the Father (famously summarized as "there was a time when the Son was not").

To settle this, bishops from across Christendom gathered in Nicaea (modern-day İznik, Turkey). The council overwhelmingly rejected Arianism. Instead, they adopted the term homoousios (meaning "of the same substance") to declare that Jesus is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father. This first version—the original Creed of Nicaea—focused



heavily on the nature of Christ and concluded with a brief statement on the Holy Spirit. As you say the Creed today (and I encourage you to do this as Jesus asks, “and you, who do say that I am?”) listen carefully for these words.

But that wasn’t the end of it

2. The Council of Constantinople (381 AD)

While Nicaea established Christ's divinity, the exact nature and role of the Holy Spirit remained a subject of intense debate. To address this and clarify the Trinity, Emperor Theodosius I summoned the First Council of Constantinople.

The bishops reaffirmed the Nicene position and significantly expanded the creed's final section to outline the divinity and co-equality of the Holy Spirit. This updated version, known officially as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, is the text most Christians recite in church services today.



So, when you say the words of the final section of the Creed today, you’ll know that they were added to give clarity to who the Holy Spirit is as true God. The Spirit we confess proceeds from the Father and Son and is the Lord AND giver of life because as Scripture clearly witnesses, the Spirit points us to Jesus and the gospel concerning him. Here is where the Spirit creates saving faith and this is what we confess and rightly so.

The Nicene Creed that we confess today is the product of two major Church Councils where Bishops and Church people came together at 2 Synods, just as Christianity was becoming tolerated in the Roman Empire. These two councils were held some 56 years apart to study Scripture particularly relating to the persons and authority of Jesus and the Holy Spirit and then to draft words which gave a true witness in response to the Gospel witness of Scripture itself. And these words serve us well today as we respond to the gospel for us.

The Great Schism and the Filioque Controversy

The creed's history also involves the defining split between the Eastern (Orthodox) and Western (Catholic) churches.

- In the 6th century, the Western Church added the Latin word filioque ("and the Son") into the creed's section on the Holy Spirit to state that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father "and the Son".

- The Eastern Church vehemently rejected this unilateral addition, contributing to the East-West Schism of 1054. To this day, the Eastern Orthodox Church uses the original 381 AD text, while Western denominations use the expanded version.

As there were different answers to Jesus' question "**and what about you, who do you say that I am?**" back in Jesus' time, so there are today. I don't agree with JD Vance's views about the Nicene Creed and signs which point to Christ's love for all people.

Because what we must understand well, as Jesus tells his disciples sternly not to tell anyone that he is the Messiah, is that he was addressing the confused understanding of people as to what the Messiah would be and do. Some expected a new holy roman Emperor to arrive from heaven with a mighty army to conquer the world. Instead, God would bring in his reign of peace through forgiveness won solely through the sacrifice of his only Son, Jesus Christ, true God eternally begotten of the Father. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. On the third day he rose again according to the scriptures. Sound familiar?

This is the news for the disciples to share. This is the gospel through which the Holy Spirit works in every language and tongue.

This is the news not to keep quiet about but to say and share boldly and with certainty for this is the witness of God's Word of promise for you and for your family and for this community and for all the world.

We learn the Nicene Creed, and we say it because it is good news for us and for all.

So, learn about it. Learn it and share it.

And what about you?

Who do you say that Jesus is?

Let's respond in the words of the Nicene Creed...

The Creed follows...*Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page*

<https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>