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Pentecost 19B
Peace, Seattle
September 13, 2015
Mark 8:27-38

WHICH FRAMING STORY?

Our gospel readings these Sundays in September cluster around the questions:
WHO IS JESUS and WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW HIM?

And today's reading from chapter 8 marks a turning point in Mark's story of Jesus, the moment when the central themes of Jesus' path—rejection, suffering, death, and rising—are articulated clearly for the first time.

It's no coincidence that the city of Caesarea Philippi serves as the backdrop for this turning point in all three of the gospels that tell this story.

- In ancient times the city was associated with the worship of Baal; the fertility god so often opposed by the prophets of the Hebrews Scriptures.
- When the Greeks took over, the city was named Paneas, after the nature god Pan from Greek mythology.
- And when Philip the Tetrarch (one of the Herods) rebuilt the city at the turn of the millennium, dedicating it to the Rome's 1st emperor—Caesar Augustus, he added yet another layer to a place with deep religious associations.

So when Jesus chooses this particular place to ask, WHO DO PEOPLE SAY THAT I AM?, he's standing on soil that has witnessed a number of **DIFFERENT FRAMING STORIES** over many centuries.

Every society, every culture has its own FRAMING STORY, its vision for understanding how the world works (or ought to). And the FRAMING STORY asserting itself in Jesus' day was that of the Roman Empire.

Yesterday our family experienced a slice of the Duwamish Tribe's Framing story as we spent the afternoon along the Duwamish River.

The event began with a welcoming of canoes and paddlers from area tribes who'd come up the river for the occasion, then it moved over to the Duwamish Longhouse, and finally ended back at the river as the canoe families departed to make their way home.

We got there in time to see the three large Salish canoes arrive, and here's what we noticed: As the paddlers approached the landing site, they stayed just off shore and, one by one, asked in the traditional way for permission to land. And one by one, Cecile Hanson, chairwoman of the Tribe, heard each request and welcomed each canoe to Duwamish land.

The rituals of welcoming hospitality continued as the gathering moved from the shoreline to the longhouse. Songs were sung, speeches were given, dances were danced, a feast was spread, and every person present was treated as an honored guest.

And when it was time for the canoes to depart again, the formal exchanges were repeated at the shore—thanksgiving for the good times shared, the food, the stories, the songs.

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The Duwamish are going through challenging times after the recent government rejection of the tribe's quest for Federal Recognition. But you wouldn't have known that yesterday. You couldn't help but come away from that experience concluding that hospitality and generosity are deeply embedded values in the Duwamish people's FRAMING STORY.[1]

When Jesus began his mission, Rome owned the FRAMING STORY for the western world.

- **Its iron-fisted central leadership, cutting edge engineering, and integrated system of transportation—all supported by a common language and enforced by a crack military—allowed Rome to overwhelm the lesser stories of lesser peoples.**

When voices emerged to challenge Rome's worldview, those voices were discredited, marginalized, persecuted, and, ultimately, silenced.

And for those who were foolish enough to advocate the overthrow of Rome, Rome had perfected a ruthlessly effective means of punishment. It was called the cross.

> "Imperial security forces would erect crosses conspicuously on hillsides near well-traveled roads near major cities of the empire. By impaling rebels like insects on pins for public view, security forces would demonstrate both the absolute and fearsome power of the empire the complete pathetic powerlessness…of the would be insurrectionists."[2]

One glance at a victim on a cross would cure almost anyone of the impulse to challenge the status quo of the *pax Romana*.[3]

As Jesus stands at Caesarea Philippi within site of a temple extolling the ROMAN EMPIRE'S FRAMING STORY, with the vestiges of other, more ancient framing stories scattered around him, he asks his disciples,

WHO DO PEOPLE SAY THAT I AM? That is: what FRAME are people placing me in?

And he gets a variety of answers –

JOHN THE BAPTIST says one. ELIJAH another. ONE OF THE PROPHETS a third chimes in.

But then Jesus sharpens the question, making it inescapably direct and personal:

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

In other words, WHAT FRAMING STORY WILL YOU ORIENT YOUR LIVES AROUND?

Peter's answer seems like the right one: YOU ARE THE MESSIAH! THE ANOINTED ONE OF GOD!

But when Jesus begins attaching content to that TITLE, fleshing out the job description, Peter tries to slam on the brakes. Why? Because Peter was operating under the influence of a FRAMING STORY in which suffering, rejection, denial, and crucifixion for God's Messiah had NO PLACE.

In his book EVERYTHING MUST CHANGE: JESUS, GLOBAL CRISES, AND A REVOLUTION OF HOPE, **Brian McLaren** cites ample evidence that OUR MODERN WORLD'S DOMINANT FRAMING STORY IS FAILING.

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[1] The event was called Duwamish Revealed: Revealing Coast Salish Cultures. http://www.duwamishrevealed.com/event/revealing-coast-salish-cultures/ For more on the decision to deny the tribe federal recognition status, go to: http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/puget-sound/duwamish-tribe-denied-federal-recognition/

[2] Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*. Thomas Nelson, 2007. Page 87.

[3] Ibid.

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Economic systems, environmental systems, equity systems, security systems, they're all breaking down. "Without altering our framing story," McLaren writes, "we will never successfully solve the crises" that hold the world captive.[4]

And that's where Jesus comes in. In the first chapter of Mark, after 40 days in the desert, Jesus comes to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying,

> THE TIME IS FULFILLED, THE REIGN OF GOD IS HERE;
> ORIENT YOUR LIVES AROUND THIS GOOD NEWS. [Mark 1:14-15, my paraphrase]

Here's the point: When Jesus proclaimed the nearness of God's kingdom he wasn't proclaiming one more in a long line of esoteric religious concepts. He was proclaiming an **alternative to empire**.

> DON'T ALLOW YOUR LIVES TO BE FRAMED BY THE NARRATIVES AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE; SITUATE YOURSELVES IN A DIFFERENT STORY, THE GOOD NEWS THAT GOD, NOT CAESAR, IS LORD, AND WE CAN LIVE IN RELATION TO GOD AND GOD'S LOVE RATHER THAN CAESAR AND CAESAR'S POWER.[5]

When Jesus called his disciples to follow him on the way, he was inviting them to live under the power of a framing story that was different than any other competing story they had known.

And when he asked them, WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM? he was finding out to what extent they had begun to make that frame their own.

Peter thought he knew, and to his credit he was ready to pronounce the truth as he knew it. But the truth as he knew it turned out to be incomplete. Only after the resurrection does the full frame of what Jesus taught and lived come into focus for Peter and the early faith communities.

So, what about us? What framing story do we live our lives within? The good news of Jesus Christ crucified and risen? Or is there some other framing story that still holds sway?

And if it's Jesus who provides our framing story, are we ready to say it OUT LOUD? To articulate it publicly—even if we don't know the full scope of where it might take us?

The missionary challenge faced by 1st century Christians was how to present the scandal of the cross as good news within a culture that scoffed at this message. The greatest evidence the church had to build on was how that Good News was creating new, inclusive communities and changing lives.

The missionary challenge facing the church in the 21st century is not much different than that of the 1st century: to demonstrate through lives of mission and service the transforming and life-giving power of living the way of Jesus.

That's one reason why thousands of Lutherans from congregations across the country—including our own—are involved in GOD'S WORK – OUR HANDS projects today.

We're going public with our commitment to serve in the neighborhoods where we've been planted; **we're getting out of the building** and becoming more visible in our communities; **we're demonstrating our care** for this neighborhood in which God has placed us—not because we'll win recognition, but because these values are written in our DNA—they're part of who we are.

[4] Ibid, page 72.
[5] Ibid, page 90.

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When Jesus asks: WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM, he's really asking:
Are you ready to live within MY STORY in a way that will bring life to your neighbors and world?

Who do you say that I am?

However you answer his question this morning, Christ's invitation stands:

Come, meet me at the table, he says. Ingest my promises, take in my love; let me show you the way.

Amen.