

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

It may sound like Jesus was either conducting a popularity poll, or trying to determine his effectiveness in the region--but I don't think that was the case.

Anthropologists now understand that much of Asia and parts of the middle east are what we call "dyadic." Like the Jewish culture of Jesus' day, dyadic cultures look outside themselves for a definition of "who they are". What others think of them determines to a large extent who they believe they are.

America, along with much of Europe are individualist cultures. Individualist cultures are more likely to find meaning within: by internally gauging "How am I doing?" "Where am I going?" "Who am I supposed to become?" We're driven by an internal barometer.

Dyadic cultures-- in contrast-- were more interested in how others were experiencing them. They depended --and modern dyadic cultures still depend-- on others to provide them with a sense of who they were.

Jews of Jesus' time were a people of community. Their communities defined them—for good and ill. This resulted in typical Mediterranean stereotyping: all Samaritans were unclean, the Canaanite woman from last week's reading was seen as a "dog". All gentiles were outcasts.

So—it became important to define people by external factors: someone is "of Nazareth", or "of Tarsus"—or they are from a hated group or caste of people. These labels provided information needed to gauge a person's proper place, to judge where they were on the honor scale. It was only by having this information that people could have what they needed to interact appropriately with others. Obviously this has both advantages and disadvantages.

So-- the question Jesus asked was not our modern one, "Who am I?", but rather: "Who do people say that I am?"

In other words—"How does the world experience me?"

For us in our very individualistic society—this question can be jarring. But it can also be eye opening. For example: would we really want to know—to hear someone tell us—how others experience us?

Think about that for a second: how do other people experience you?

Well—I'm pretty sure most see me as Lisa Fry, middle aged female, priest. If they know me a little longer they might find that I am a former singer, a huge Star Trek geek, and my favorite color is purple. Those people who know me even better know my other abilities and my shortcomings, but how about those who don't know me well? Is it apparent to everyone I meet—without my collar – that I am a follower of Jesus?

Do they experience me as a person who respects the dignity of every human being? Do they see me as someone who loves ALL of my neighbors? After someone has spent time with me do they say, "She really loves God and all people!"

And if they aren't thinking that—***why aren't they thinking that?***

I remember several years ago-- a friend once shared with me how I was sometimes perceived— a lot of it was good, but some of it wasn't very flattering. It hurt to hear it—but I've never forgotten that glimpse of me

through another's eyes. It was humbling--and a little frightening-- to discover that the way the world sees me wasn't necessarily the way I saw myself. That glimpse from the outside was a wake-up call. And it changed me.

So – when Jesus asked this question of the disciples—he was probably aware than many perceived him as a madman, a rabble-rouser—a danger to the traditional ways of life. But others saw him as a prophet: someone who spoke truth to power— chastising an often judgmental Jewish religious hierarchy, and encouraging them to embrace the radical notion that love of God and every single person superseded all the other rules. And it was true—he was all those things.

"To an outsider, does Christianity look like Jesus?"
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The Rev Lisa Fry

But it was Peter, his closest friend, who saw him as what he knew himself to be at his core: the Christ: the one whom God had anointed. And he was anointed not as a militaristic messiah—returning Israel to power by force: he was the messiah that the prophet Isaiah had predicted: a servant to all.

This *anointed one* was a friend of sinners—people who had made mistakes—sometimes grievous ones; an advocate for the poor, and those without much standing in society. This *anointed one* was someone who hung out with the outcast—people society didn't understand or didn't approve of. God had called him to preach, teach and incarnate the love that God envisioned for all of us.

To those outside the church, too often Christianity no longer looks like Jesus.

Here's what Christianity looks like in the recent surveys: hypocritical, bigoted, homophobic, extremist, judgmental—and this one really hurts: unloving.

This makes me sad. So let's show them that they are wrong. This is what I see:

I see a church that welcomes the stranger. I see a church which spends time struggling to understand new concepts, and different types of people. Doing our best to love both God AND neighbor. I see a church reaching out

to others in good times and in bad. I see a vestry that decides that all people are welcome and can be a part of a flourishing community. I see us worshipping God with all the beauty we can muster, and finding Christ's face in each other, and teaching our children to do the same.

That's what I see. Let's bring THAT face to Camden. Who do they say that we are? I hope we all look like Jesus.

Amen.