

"BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?"

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As we walked along, He was both with us and alone. We had seen Him like this before -- outwardly present, but inwardly focussed on some mysterious brooding of the soul. We fell back a few paces lest our idle chatter should break His concentration.

Presently He stopped beneath a spacious tree and made Himself comfortable in the grass. In a matter of minutes, we were camped around Him, not a little curious as to what would happen next. One thing about this carpenter from Nazareth, He never ran out of surprises. Tagging around with Him one had to be ready for anything. I remember it well....

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And most certainly, He wasn't one to worry about how He was going over in the eyes of others. His equilibrium on this score was a quiet wonder in its own way. Large crowds chanting His acclaim did not turn His head. Resistance and rejection did not plunge Him into despair and disappointment.

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It struck me as strange that one individual could be seen in such varying ways. Now John the Baptist and Elijah, well they were my kind of preacher. They hit hard. Told it like it was. Neither could be bought off. They had a zeal that even their opponents were forced to admire. You might not have liked or believed what they were saying, but there was no doubting the fact they believed it!

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Stretched out there on the grassy hillside, I fell to thinking about the different impressions that Jesus made on people. He could be urgent and provocative, but He also exuded tenderness and patience. He feared no man. ~~The~~ But failed and the forgotten folks - not to mention little children - felt His warmth and welcome and encouragement. His range was a minor miracle, really. Why had I not noticed this before? It was getting to be a good retreat.

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I rose and stood before Him. I felt possessed by some unseen Presence. I extended my ~~right~~ arm straight out and said in a voice louder than was necessary, "Thou art the Christ - the Son of the living God!" Yes, I said it. I said it.

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You see, for two years I had been with Him. I had seen Him under every conceivable kind of pressure. I had watched Him keep His cool in the presence of adversaries. I had heard Him pray for them by name before the sun went down.

I had listened to Him preach on simple things....like a flower in the field, a lamp-stand, a pinch of salt, a wad of leaven, a mustard seed, a missing coin -- and felt my heart leap with joy that God's kingdom was so sure and so near to us.

I had seen Him heal. I had seen Him breathe new dignity and hope into lives that thought that no one cared. I had seen Him withstand the powerful - and comfort those of low degree.

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SON OF THE LIVING GOD

"The Son of the living God!" Not the kind of language that you would expect from a fisherman.

I assure you those were not loaded terms for me. I reached for them instinctively with an eager, but untrained mind. I'm no rabbi. I never went to school. What I intended to say is that I found in Jesus all that one could ever, should ever, need ever mean by God. In Him, you see, God had become transparent for me. He served as the lens through which ever after I would envision the invisible God. Always He pointed beyond Himself to another whose will someday shall be done on earth as it is now done in heaven!

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"Blessed art thou, Simon, Son of John. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church."

He was as happy as I had ever seen Him. His joy was contagious. Soon we were pounding one another's shoulders. We had done something good for Him for a change. In some small way we had ministered to a need that He had to be rightly understood. And to think that what I blurted out would be the rock confession of the faith of the Church....the Church that bears His name. But that's not all...

Less than a year later my faith lost its anchor. I was adrift on a sea of

doubt. There was that dark, terrible night in Jerusalem when I denied I even knew Him. And those nails that ripped and tore His flesh killed my dreams and crucified my hopes. Where was God when all of this was going on? What would happen to me? - to all of us who had walked with Him? The rock had turned to sand. It looked like it was all over.

JESUS WAS ALIVE And then - on a day for which all other days were made I heard the astounding news that Jesus was alive. Nothing was over. Everything had just begun. He was more - not less - that I had hoped for and dreamed of on that day in Caesarea Philippi.

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PRAYER Father of us all, through Christ, Your Son and our Lord, we come to You. We feel your nearness and your presence, your spirit, moving in these moments.

Confirm with us the feelings, the convictions, the decisions of this hour of worship. Forgive us where we have fallen short; strengthen and renew our faith in Him. For it is through Him that we see You.

Help us in these quiet moments to answer honestly and sincerely and alone that question put to us by Christ, "But who do you say that I am?" And as we answer, each in his own heart, in his own words, may we like Peter find our true and best selves in Him.

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