

27 - PETER'S CONFESSION

Luke 9:18-27

Prayer led Jesus to put the crucial question of his true identity to the disciples he had been preparing for in sharing his ministry (vs. 18). The disciples response was to repeat the gossip and sincere inquiries they had been hearing from the crowds they mingled with and on their first mission tour (vs. 19). It was Peter, always the most forthright, who answered for them all: "The Messiah of God."

What came next is notably different from Matthew's version of the same incident. In Luke's narrative, Jesus offered no words of praise or commendation such as Matthew reported. Why? Because each of the Gospel authors used his own judgment as to the meaning of the confession.

Generally Luke followed Mark in having Jesus immediately command the disciples to keep this revelation secret. Then he declared as clearly and simply as possible what lay ahead of them: his passion and death. Luke also had Jesus state unequivocally the prospect of resurrection.

Did Jesus know this? The gospel record is ambiguous. If he did, why the fervent request in Gethsemane to go free from crucifixion? And why, both in Gethsemane and on the cross, did he yield himself to God's will and death as all humans must do? This is one of the enigmas of the nature of Jesus, the Messiah/Christ. Was he both human and divine as the church has declared in its doctrine and theology since the 4th century CE?

We, like Luke, know the answer from a post-resurrection faith. The disciples did not. Through the next sequence of thoughts Luke expressed what he believed, putting them into the mouth of Jesus himself. These words were unlikely to have been from the memory of the disciples. They were more probably drawn from the preaching and teaching of the early church as they reflected on what they had seen and heard.

Like so much else that we read as quotations from Jesus (sometimes in printed in red to distinguish them), they were interpretations of the deeper meaning of the life and ministry of Jesus. To regard these words literally contradicts Jesus' full humanity. He certainly would have known the risks of declaring the arrival of God's reign of love and acting upon that conviction by showing compassion to those on the fringes of his time. To quote Sharon Ringe:

"That the passion predictions are principally theological statements not historical reports is clear from the way these formal predictions, like other summaries of Jesus' passion, are linked to divine necessity (9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 24:6-7) or the fulfilment of scripture (18:31-33; 24:44-46)."

The point of denying oneself to be a follower of Jesus (9:23-27) "form the core of a set of teaching about the meaning and nature of discipleship." This does not mean giving up pleasures and comforts of life. It means to set aside such goals as status and privilege that depend on competing to be known, recognized and esteemed.