

I came up with the idea to do a name game for my children's sermon very early in the week, several days before I even had the time to look over the readings for today.

I like to see irony in things, so imagine my delight when, with the name game children's sermon in mind, I looked at the gospel for today and read about Jesus asking the disciples "Who do people say that I am?"

Two very loaded questions, and while my children's sermon was about names and Jesus' questions were about his role as Messiah, they strike me as related in the way both are attempts to get to know each other more deeply; in my case as a new Pastor with the children, and in Jesus' case as the Messiah with his disciples.

And the greatest thing in the gospel lesson is how quickly Peter got the right answer. Sure, the people had various ideas about Jesus' identity, but good old impulsive Peter said out loud what all the others were thinking but were afraid to say: "You are the Messiah."

What a great moment. We're exactly half way through Mark's gospel and already Peter knows that this Jesus, this teacher, this leader, is God's Messiah, come to save Israel. But then things took a turn for the worse for good old, impulsive Peter.

When Peter gave the right answer, Jesus then proceeded to allow them to come closer. He told them that he would be persecuted, tried, and killed, and that even more amazingly he would rise from the dead. Peter would have none of this. Can't you just see Peter pulling Jesus on the side and trying to take the superior role? "No Jesus, it's not going to work that way," I imagine Peter saying, "We're going to overthrow the Romans and you'll be King." To which Jesus replied "Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Now, lest we be too hard on Peter, let me tell you a little story from my childhood. In his day, my dad was one of the great high school basketball players in the State of New Jersey. In his junior year he set the state scoring record and then broke it in his senior year, earning him a full scholarship to Seton Hall University.

So, as Bob Moroney's son, you can understand that I was expected to play and be good at basketball. I remember joining my first team at about age 8, and going to practices to learn offense and defense. I remember learning that defense was about trying to keep the other team from scoring. So when the season began I was determined to show the coach that I had learned well.

At one point in a game, while I was covering one of the boys on the other team, I stuck my hand in really quick and stole the ball from him. I knew that I had just pulled a defensive gem, so I then began dribbling towards the basket in a state of euphoria. I dribbled to the basket, tossed the ball up and through the net and then turned, expecting to see the jubilant faces of my team mates, but instead

found that my teammates were staring at me blankly while the other team celebrated. You see, I had shot the ball into the wrong basket, and scored two points for the other team.

In my mind, that story parallels what Peter did, although on a less profound level, because Peter thought he learned well and he did, but then he headed off in the wrong direction and shot the ball in the wrong basket just like I did.

We are often in a state of flux between getting it and not getting it. "Yes Jesus, you are the Messiah" but we spend most of our lives trying to learn what it means to follow Jesus.

Another example is that 233 years ago Thomas Jefferson in wrote the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal, but we've spent the last two centuries plus learning that that applies to people who are not of European descent, that it applies to women, that it applies to absolutely everyone.

It seems to me that it is one thing to perceive a profound truth, and another thing to know how to apply it. Peter perceived the truth that Jesus was the one God sent to help humanity, but then he missed how to apply it, so Jesus gave him the application: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. Those who want to save their life will not lose it, and those who lose it for my sake will save it."

In other words, we will never fully become the person God wants us to be until we give up our pursuits of autonomy and personal power. We give up our lives by getting over ourselves, our wants and our worries, and trusting that the God who got us to this day is the God who will get us through this day. Yes Jesus, you are the Messiah, now teach me what it means to live for you and live for others, placing myself at a distant third. Amen.