

September 13 B 2015

My oldest dog is named Tiguak.

That's an unusual name. It's an Inuit term which means "adopted."

She is 14½ years old, and her time with us is growing short.

But I remember the day she was adopted into our family.

North of Nashwauk, there was a family that breeds Siberian Huskies.

One summer, they were overstocked with puppies.

So we went up to look at them.

We went into a pen, and two litters of Siberian Husky puppies were released upon us. There must have been 15 or 20.

They were so cute and beautiful...so energetic and lively.

How do you choose?

One little puppy crawled up on me and sat on my lap.

Yep...we had been chosen.

Yep...this is the one for us.

And Tig has been with us ever since.

Anybody here like ice cream? Me, too.

Have you ever tried the ice cream at The Warming Shack in Cloquet?

My wife and I were there last Saturday evening...on our way home from the Cities.

Maybe you have stopped there for coffee.

Last Saturday, it was too hot for coffee.

We had to have ice cream.

The problem is...there's like 25 to 30 different flavors of ice cream.

How do you choose?

I ended up with pumpkin pie and cupcake ice cream. Good choices.

RitaRae chose peanut butter ecstasy and after dinner mint. Good choices.

Often, life gives us lots of good choices.

A smorgasbord of food.

There are so many different kinds of shoes at the shoe store...

All those books at Barnes and Noble...

All those televisions at Best Buy...

All those cookies, rolls, and donuts at The Italian Bakery.

So many good things from which to choose. Isn't life grand?

But what about when the options aren't so great.
After all, most scenarios of life are not purely win-win.
Sometimes our options are not between cute puppies and bins of ice cream.
Sometimes, every option has negative consequences.
You are diagnosed with cancer...and you have choices to make.
You can choose to do nothing...and let the disease take its course.
Sometimes you get to choose between surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation.
There are problems with each choice...risks, complications, side effects.
How do you choose?
That's when your values come into play...what you consider important...
your principles of life.
They are what you depend on to choose.

Or the difficult day comes when you have to place your senior parent into hospice.
Never an easy decision.
All kinds of implications.
A whole boat load of different feelings.
Lots of uncertainty.
Again, not a win-win situation. There are problems with each choice.
Again, it will boil down to what you value...what you think is important...
How you understand what life is all about and what death is all about.

We have a challenging and wonderful Gospel story today.
It occurs right in the middle of the Gospel of Mark...at the pinnacle of the Gospel.
It's like...the whole first half of the gospel leads us to this point.
Jesus and the disciples travel to Caesarea Philippi.
I know this about Caesarea Philippi...
It is the farthest north that Jesus and the disciples ever traveled.
It is way out of the way.
It was not Jewish country.
So why did he travel there to have this conversation with the disciples?
Something else I know about Caesarea Philippi.
Archeologists have done a lot of digging in that area.
They have uncovered temple after temple, shrine after shrine. Clearly...
Caesarea Philippi was a place where many different gods were worshipped.
Every major religious option of the day was represented there.

Caesarea was a smorgasbord of religious beliefs.
So picture Jesus standing in front of a dozen different temples...
Where people gathered to worship many different gods.
Now hear him ask the disciples, Who do you say that I am?
Among all your options, what do you say about me?

You can understand this, because you live in a world of choices.
You have a smorgasbord of options: for your time...for your energy...for your money...for your enthusiasm...for your commitment.
There are so many different ways that you can invest yourself.
There are so many different options for your heart.
In our Gospel story today, Jesus is asking you: Who do you say that I am?

Sometimes we cram Jesus in among our many choices.
After all, he is the norm for small city life in northern Minnesota.
You know, part of the status quo.
Sometimes...reduced to one value among many.
And we believe in him...
As long as he doesn't get in the way of our lake cabin, our hunting times, the hockey season, vacations,
As long as he doesn't get in the way of my family, my entertainment, my work, and my rest.
Jesus leads you to Caesarea Philippi and stands before the options of the world... and asks, Who do you say that I am?

Increasingly, in our culture, people walk away from the life of faith.
When asked about religious affiliation by the pollsters, the "nones" are increasing.
You know, I just don't have time.
You know, what I believe about God isn't exactly what I hear on Sunday morning.
You know, sometimes the church just plain grates against my sensibilities.
You know, it's just easier...and more convenient...just to do my own thing.
That's why Jesus leads you to Caesarea Philippi and stands before the options of the world...and asks, Who do you say that I am?

What are you going to say?
Simon Peter spoke for you...and for all the disciples of every time and place.
Peter said: YOU ARE THE MESSIAH.

Who do you say that I am? You are the Messiah, the Christ.
Where is your hope? Christ.
Where do you find peace? Christ.
Where do you see most clearly God's forgiveness, mercy, love, grace? Christ.
Where do you find the values and truths that sustain life in the here and now?
Christ.
When the options are not win-win, where can you turn? Christ.
Where do you find the words of eternal life? Christ.

If Jesus is more than just a piece of culture...
and if we have many choices...
and if we do not belong to the "nones" ...
how do you grow and mature into being a person of faith?
God tells us the way through Isaiah the prophet.
We heard the words in our Old Testament reading: MORNING BY MORNING,
GOD WAKENS MY EAR TO HEAR AS THOSE WHO ARE TAUGHT.
Morning by morning, God speaks to you; encouraging, nudging, questioning.
Teaching you what is true, not what is nice.
What is good news, not what is comfortable news;
What are the words of eternal life, not easy living.
God through the prophet Isaiah promises that all our adversaries—those inside of
us, as well as those outside of us—will melt away, will be worn down and vanish,
because God will have the final victory.
It will be done God's way.
And that victory is yours in Jesus Christ, through our Savior who died on the cross
for you...and who was raised to new life.
He invites you to the journey of life with him.
He calls you to be faithful.
He lives out for you the new life that is yours through God's grace.
He promises to walk with you every step of the way.
Who do you say that I am? You are the Messiah.
Peace to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ.