



Speak for Yourself

1st Thursday in Lent

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?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Mark 8: 27-31

Have you ever had the experience of having the right answer to a question but still getting it wrong? Peter did, at least in this reading from the Gospel of Mark.

As they walked from one place to the next, at a time which unbeknownst to them was a pivotal point in their shared journey with Jesus, the Lord asked the Twelve: "Who do people say that I am?" They had been out there among the crowds talking and listening. What was the public's opinion? And they answered with what they had been hearing: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets, which was to say the forerunner of the Christ. Close, but not quite on the target.

"What do others say" is usually a relatively safe question to answer because, if for no other reason, it relieves us of the responsibility of having to declare for ourselves. I grew up and into the Christian faith, as perhaps you did as well. I inherited a belief system and understanding of discipleship from my parents, family members, and the community of faith in which I was nurtured, but at some point, like the Twelve in this story, I, like you, was called upon to declare what I believe and to claim my inheritance in the faith as my own.

"But who do *you* say that I am?" Jesus asked them and Peter answered for them all: "You are the Messiah." And he was right, dead right, but at the same time wrong, dead wrong, for what Peter understood about the Messiah and consequently about himself and others who followed Jesus was diametrically opposed to what Jesus understood.

None of us begins the journey with Jesus fully understanding Jesus, any more than we fully understand anyone else in the circle of our lives. Understanding comes with time and with sharing the journey together. May this Lent be a time of growing understanding for you as you share the journey of these days with Jesus and with one another in the community of Christian faith.