

Scripture Reading: John 12:42-43 & Matthew 16:13

Nevertheless, among the chief rulers, many believed on him: but because of the Pharisees they would not be a known of it, lest they should be excommunicated. For they loved the praise that is given of men, more than the praise that cometh of God. ~ John 12:42-43

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ~ Matthew 16:1

From Lent to Easter is a perfect time to draw closer to God and read the Scriptures and recollect the story of Jesus's life, passion, death, and resurrection. Knowing the stories, we must come again to ask ourselves who Jesus is and would we say so in public. If asked, do we value the praise of man more than the praise of God?

There's an old morality folktale that has been used in many situations throughout history and perhaps most popularly by the trial lawyer Gerry Spence when asked to decide what's true and who is responsible for deciding. The story goes:

Once there was a wise Rabbi and a smart Pharisee. The Pharisee was driven by a single desire to expose the Rabbi as a fool and become a leader of his sect. The Pharisee had a plan. He had captured a small and fragile bird in the forest. With the bird cupped in his hands so that the Rabbi could not see it, the Pharisee schemed to approach the Rabbi and ask, "Rabbi, what do I have in my hand?" The Rabbi would reply, "You have a bird, my son."

Then the Pharisee would ask, "Rabbi, is the bird alive or dead?" If the Rabbi replied that it was dead, the Pharisee would open his hands and allow the bird to fly off into the forest. But if the Rabbi replied that the bird was alive, the Pharisee would crush the bird inside his cupped hands until it was dead.

Then the Pharisee would open his hands and say, "See, the bird is dead!"

And so, the Pharisee went to the Rabbi, and he said, as planned, "Rabbi, what do I have in my hands?" The Rabbi, as predicted, replied, "You have a bird, my son."

"Rabbi," the Pharisee said with disdain, "is the bird alive or *dead*?" After that, the Rabbi looked at the Pharisee with his kindly old eyes and replied, "The bird is in your hands, my son."

As the story points out, the moral choice is ours to make. It is our choice to believe. In our moments of sin, we can be modern-day Pharisees. Modern-day Pharisees ask us who is Jesus? Is Jesus alive or dead?

Would you answer as Simon says in reply to Jesus's question, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." -Matthew 16:16 Every Lenten season, I affirm my belief. It warms me to spend time reading scripture, praying, and living my faith on this Lenten journey through Easter.

Christ is alive in my heart and hands. So may Christ also be in yours.

Prayer: Loving God, we are called upon to answer whether we believe in Christ in our life. May we find our answer knowing the story of Jesus is written so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we may have life in His name."-John 20:31

~ Submitted by Scott Walter for the Thirty-Third Reading of Lent