

## Rev Rita Message Sept 12 2021

The scripture reading for this morning presents us with a question that is fundamental to our faith, a question that is central to our identity as Christians: Who is Jesus? As Christians we claim to be followers of Jesus. But just who is this person that we are following? Who is this person that inspired the building of an enormous transnational institution – the Church – and gave it the strength to survive through the centuries while whole kingdoms and empires have come and gone? Who is this person whom two billion people worship and adore and claim as their Lord and Savior? Who is this person that 2,000 years after his birth is still making headlines?

Over the centuries almost all Christians have believed a perfectly astounding thing, namely that the carpenter from Nazareth, the one who went about loving poor, marginalized people; healing the needy; and demonstrating an incredible love for neighbors – this person is God in the flesh.

Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" is as relevant to us today as it was to Jesus' disciples in the first. And just as there were many answers to choose from in his day, there are many answers to choose from in ours.

The United Church New Creed answers that question with these words: We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit.

The Rev Talitha Arnold is a United Church of Christ minister in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She answered Jesus' question with these words:

*"In his masterwork, "Messiah," George Friederic Handel pulled out all the stops with his "Hallelujah Chorus." From its first "Hallelujah" to its last, the piece uses trumpets, timpani, every other instrument in the orchestra, and every voice in the chorus to proclaim the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."*

*By its end, Handel left no doubt that the Messiah "shall reign forever-and ever, forever and ever!"*

*But then the composer did something totally unexpected. His "Messiah" doesn't end with that triumphant chorus. Instead the choir sits, the timpani are silent. Finally the soprano soloist stands up. Accompanied only by the strings, she sings the aria, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."*

*No trumpets or kettle drums. Not even another voice. Just the lone soprano proclaiming the faith. "I know that my Redeemer liveth."*

*"But who do you say that I am?" Jesus asks his disciples. Bottom line, that's the only thing that matters. Not what others think, believe, or say-but what you think, believe, and say about this Jesus.*

*It's one thing to proclaim "Lord of Lords and King of Kings" when you're surrounded by everyone singing a hundred "Hallelujahs." But when the music stops, the choir closes their books, and we're left standing alone, what do we sing?*

*"I know that my Redeemer liveth," Handel affirmed. Who do you say that he is?"*

May your answers to that question open your hearts and minds to the transforming presence of God in your life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.