

Mark 8:27—9:1

Learner  
Session  
Guide

**Focus Statement**

This story marks a turning point in the Gospel as Peter finally states what has been increasingly obvious: Jesus is the Christ. Yet even as he gets this right, Peter demonstrates how much more he has to learn about Jesus' identity.

**Key Verse**

[Jesus] asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." **Mark 8:29**

## Who Do You Say Jesus Is?

**Focus Image**



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### Gather

#### Check-in

Welcome! Take this opportunity to reconnect with your fellow learners and to recall the previous lesson. Share insights and questions that came up since your last session.

#### Pray

*Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we give you thanks for giving the gift of your Son. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us as we follow the way of the cross. Amen.*

#### Focus Activity

Consider the Focus Image, an artist's image of Jesus. Draw a picture or create a painting of your own image of Jesus. What do you include? What colors do you use?



Notes

### Open Scripture

Read Mark 8:27—9:1.

- What words or actions catch your attention as you hear this text?
- How do you feel about Jesus' reactions to the different people in this story?
- What questions do you have about this text?

### Join the Conversation

#### Historical Context

1. *Messiah* is a Jewish word that means “anointed one.” Its Greek equivalent is the word *Christ*. In the Old Testament, the term is applied to a number of figures who have been anointed or designated to be agents of God’s will. These especially included the kings of Israel (for example, see 2 Samuel 22:51; 23:1; Psalm 2:2; 18:50). At the time of Jesus, there was no single or standard view regarding the coming of God’s Messiah. In general, there was an expectation that God would send the ideal king who, as God’s anointed, royal agent, would reestablish the kingdom of Israel by vanquishing God’s principal enemy, the Romans.

- What images does the word *Messiah* bring to mind for you?
- List some principal traits you would expect in such a Messiah.

2. Crucifixion was a means of capital punishment carried out by the Romans against those who threatened the social order of the empire. This was an extremely gruesome method of execution reserved for non-Roman citizens such as rebellious slaves, bandits, and persons judged to have committed treason against Rome. At the same time, crucifixion was a type of social terrorism: the victim was humiliatingly crucified in a public location to send a message to the

general populace that if anyone else threatened Roman social order, they too would end up on a cross.

- In our culture, how are criminals condemned to death generally viewed?
- In Jesus' culture, how do you think criminals condemned to death would have been viewed? Discuss what it would have meant to be linked to someone condemned to be crucified by the Romans.

### Literary Context

1. In Mark's Gospel, readers are initially introduced to Jesus' messianic identity in the very first sentence (Mark 1:1). For the characters within Mark's story, however, Mark 8:29 is the first time that any human correctly identifies Jesus as the Messiah.
  - What seems to be the general public opinion of Jesus held by people in the story?
  - How do you think Peter understood Jesus to be the Messiah? What might that have meant to him?
2. The session Scripture text comes right in the very middle of Mark's story. It includes the first time that readers (as well as the characters in the story) are told about Jesus' impending passion—his suffering and death. Up to this point in the story, Jesus has triumphed over all opposition, whether it be human, demonic, or from nature.
  - Read Mark 8:31. Discuss how Jesus' revelation changes the whole nature and direction of the story. How does your understanding of Mark's story change once you know how the story will end?
  - Peter takes Jesus to the side and scolds him (Mark 8:32). How would you explain this? What does it show about his perspective regarding Jesus? Regarding being a follower of Jesus?
  - Describe your reaction to Jesus addressing Peter as "Satan" (Mark 8:33). How would you explain Jesus' words? Make a list of items that might be included in "human things" and another list of some "divine things." What might Jesus mean when he tells Peter that he is setting his mind on human things rather than divine things?
3. It is one thing to believe in a crucified Messiah, and another thing to follow a crucified Messiah. Using blunt terms, the way of discipleship is presented in Mark 8:34-38.
  - Identify some of the marks of discipleship presented here.
  - Why is the way of the cross presented as the way of discipleship?
  - The way of discipleship depicted here is countercultural. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?





### Notes

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with an orange border, intended for taking notes during the session.

### Lutheran Context

1. In the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, Martin Luther developed what came to be regarded as his *theology of the cross*. For Luther this meant that human beings are incapable of understanding the invisible things of God through human wisdom or philosophy. Instead, we come to understand God most fully and most visibly in Jesus' crucifixion. The cross, then, is a paradox in that God's power, wisdom, and glory are revealed in what appears to be human weakness, foolishness, and shame.

- What comes to mind when you hear the term “theology of the cross”?
- What are some facets of a theology of the cross that you see at work in Mark 8:27—9:1?

2. At baptism, the person being baptized is told, “Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever” (*ELW*, p. 231).

- What does it mean to you that you have been marked with the cross of Christ forever? Answer this question in a poem, prayer, or journal entry.

### Devotional Context

1. Jesus is one of the most known (if not *the* most known) figure in history. Non-Christians as well as Christians not only have some basic knowledge about Jesus, but also hold some basic views about who he was and what he did.

- In general, how do you think non-Christians view Jesus? How does that compare to how Christians view Jesus?
- If someone asked you, “Who do you say that Jesus is?” how would you respond?
- Discuss why it can be hard for us to share our beliefs about Jesus with other people.

2. Jesus called on would-be followers to deny themselves, pick up their cross, and follow him. Picking up our cross does not mean we have a particular burden to bear in life, but that we seek to follow the way of the cross in our own lives.

- What does it mean for you to deny yourself?
- What does it mean for you to pick up your cross and follow Jesus?

3. Jesus scolded Peter because he was setting his mind on human things rather than divine things (Mark 8:33).

- What are some of the human things you set your mind on? How does that impact your following Jesus?
- What are some of the divine things you set your mind on? How does that impact your following Jesus?

### Wrap-up

Be ready to look back over the work your group has done in this session.

### Pray

*Behold, Lord, an empty vessel that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it. I am weak in the faith; strengthen me. I am cold in love; warm me and make me fervent, that my love may go out to my neighbor. I do not have a strong and firm faith; at times I doubt and am unable to trust you altogether. O Lord, help me. Strengthen my faith and trust in you. In you I have sealed the treasure of all I have. I am poor; you are rich and came to be merciful to the poor. I am a sinner; you are upright. With me, there is an abundance of sin; in you is the fullness of righteousness. Therefore I will remain with you, of whom I can receive, but to whom I may not give. Amen. (A prayer of Martin Luther, ELW, p. 87)*

## Extending the Conversation

### Homework

1. Read the next session's Bible text: Mark 9:2-13. Try to imagine what the glory of God looks like.
2. Each day this week, pray the prayer of Martin Luther (the closing prayer for this session). Be aware of your focus on human things and divine things during the week. If you keep a journal, record your observations. Note what caused you to focus on human things and purposeful steps you took to focus on divine things.
3. Search in books, magazines, or on the Internet for different images of crosses. Choose one that speaks to you and put it in your journal or near your workspace. As you go about your day, think about what it means to be baptized and marked with the cross of Christ. Additionally, you can reflect on baptism each morning when you wash your face. (Martin Luther suggested this exercise in his writings.)



Notes



### Notes

### Enrichment

1. If you want to read through the entire book of Mark during this unit, read the following sections this week.

Day 1: Mark 5:1-20

Day 2: Mark 5:21-43

Day 3: Mark 6:1-13

Day 4: Mark 6:14-29

Day 5: Mark 6:30-44

Day 6: Mark 6:45-56

Day 7: Mark 7:1-8

2. Remembering the historical context in this session relating to crucifixion, read the ELCA Social Statement on the Death Penalty (<http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Death-Penalty.aspx>). Another option would be watching the movie *Dead Man Walking* (Havoc, 1995). What similarities and differences do you see between the historical practice of crucifixion and the practice of the death penalty today?

3. The movie *Romero* (Paulist Pictures, 1989) is the story of a Salvadoran priest who gave up his life for the sake of the gospel. Watch the movie and reflect on Romero's transformation from a timid, scholarly priest to a leader who took up the cross of the poor and disenfranchised.

### For Further Reading

*Jesus' Many Faces* (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/>). This PBS site presents scholarly considerations about what we do and do not always know regarding who Jesus was and how he lived.

Available from [www.augsburgfortress.org/store](http://www.augsburgfortress.org/store):

*Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* by Martin Hengel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977). A presentation on how crucifixion was regarded in the ancient world and its implications for the proclamation of a crucified Messiah.

*Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). A recent edition of Bonhoeffer's classic work on the cost of discipleship, which opens with the profound statement, "Cheap grace is the mortal enemy of our church. Our struggle today is for costly grace."

Mark 9:2-13

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**Focus Statement**

The glory of God recalls the past and will be fully revealed in the future. For the present, it is the power of Christ's cross among us.

**Key Verse**

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" **Mark 9:7**

## What Does the Glory of God Look Like?

**Focus Image**



*Transfiguration of Christ* (1437-45) by Fra Angelico (1400-55). © De Agostini/SuperStock

### Gather

#### Check-in

Take this time to connect or reconnect with the others in your group. Be ready to share new thoughts or insights about your last session.

#### Pray

*Almighty God, you displayed your glory when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain. In this time of study, grant us the eyes to see and the ears to hear what Jesus teaches us today. Help us to not simply build memorials to the past, but learn to walk into the future with confidence as we follow Christ, our crucified and risen Lord. Amen.*

#### Focus Activity

Look at the Focus Image, the *Transfiguration of Christ* by Fra Angelico, a Dominican monk. (St. Dominic, founder of the Dominicans, and the Virgin Mary are included in the picture.) What words would you use to describe this event and your reaction to it? What are the most important things in the scene? What other events in the life of Jesus are hinted at in this picture?