Text: Mark 8:27-38

**Introduction**

What’s in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. At least that is Juliet reasoning about her Romeo. Knowing full well that neither her Capulets nor his Montagues would agree. I sometimes think that one’s response to that scene is the best dividing line for childhood and adulthood. On the one side there are no obstacles that can’t be overcome. On the other is the full recognition of a fallen world. What both share though is the intimation of something better. The sweetness of Juliet is that love can change the world we live in. It can erase things as deep as names. The wisdom of the audience going “no, Juliet, no” is that this world is not kind to such thoughts, but maybe this world is not everything.

**Text**

Both the Old Testament and the Gospel reading are about names in some way. And the Bible is definitely against Juliet’s reasoning. There is a lot in a name. Which might be apparent from the 2nd commandment. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain. It is a big theme of the bible the progressive revelation of God’s name. Abraham and the Patriarchs call the one who has called them out of Ur – God Almighty. It is Moses when called who demands to know The Name. Who shall I say has sent me? And God Almighty says YHWH. We try and translate that I AM. Because it does look something like a form of the verb to be. And at that point we are playing with philosophical concepts. God Almighty is the ground of all being. But it is also just a name YHWH. The angel tells Mary and Joseph to call the child Jesus. And Jesus will instruct his disciples to pray “Our Father”. And he will promise “the Holy Spirit”. And at the Ascension tells the disciples to baptize in the name of the “The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” What’s in a name? Start with the Trinity, something it would take 300 years to get to the Nicene Creed and another 400 years to arrive at the Athanasian Creed – that long one we say once a year.

Jesus asks his disciples a name question, “who do people say that I am?” When people say Jesus, what are they thinking? What cloud of hopes and dreams and reality do they attach to that name?

And the disciples provide Jesus with some names. John the Baptist. That’s Jesus’ cousin. But what is probably meant by these people is the return of strong prophecy. Surely the cousin Jesus, whom John himself pointed at as greater, is going to continue the prophetic activity against the corruption of the present age. Whether that is the Jerusalem priesthood, or the puppet governments, or Rome itself.

Elijah. That means something close to John the Baptist. But it is probably folks who didn’t hear Jesus say that John was the Elijah. The people who are saying Elijah are merely saying that Jesus is a sign of the last things. If John the Baptist might have been a sign of renew here on this old earth. Elijah was the world weary response that this age is coming to a close.

Others said “one of the prophets.” I appreciate that Matthew’s version of this separates out Jeremiah from the “other” category. Some recognized a man of sorrows in Jesus. If those who said John the Baptist were the Juliets of the world. John, Jesus, what does it matter. We just need a prophet who will clear away the corruption here and now. Those who were saying Jeremiah knew their history of such prophets. They all die in Jerusalem, largely unheard. Later generation with perfect hindsight glorify their tombs. And this Jesus looks awfully similar.

But Jesus is not content with the general summary of what people think. He wants to know what do you think. “Who do you say that I am?”

In the story Peter comes up with the right answer. “You are the Christ.” Now Christ is simply anointed one. It’s the greek version of messiah. But Peter’s answer is a precocious one. It’s like the 9 year old playing flawless Bach. It happens, but they don’t understand what they’ve played. Or maybe even more on the spot, it’s the High Schooler in geometry who has looked up and memorized the proof for congruent angles without knowing what congruent means.

**Christology**

That’s what the next scene makes clear. They’ve looked up the correct answers, but don’t know the content of that name. So Jesus starts to teach them that. And if they’ve got a Juliet, John the Baptist, understanding to this point, they might be forgiven. Too this point Jesus has performed wonders. He’s fed 5000 and 4000. He’s sent out the disciples who were able themselves to work wonders. He’s walked on water and calmed storms. This one is the Christ. Who is going to march into Jerusalem and be given the throne of his father David.

But there is more to this name. The “other prophets” aren’t wrong. “The son of man – Jesus’ name for himself – must suffer, and be rejected, and killed, and rise.” If your Christ can’t include suffering, rejection and death, you don’t understand the name.

And Peter’s Christ can’t include these things. He takes Jesus aside and begins rebuking him. You can fill in the words. Jesus, that isn’t happening. Jesus no Christ is going through those things. The Christ goes from victory to victory. Like Juliet telling Romeo, just doff you name and you shall have all of me. And Romeo responds, “I will no longer be known as Romeo.” Completely missing the name that is important.

And Jesus stops Peter abruptly “Get behind me Satan!” Because this is what Satan is really good at, confusing names. Changing definitions. Getting us to substitute our thoughts for the revelation of God.

Peter missed the “on the third day rise.” The Christ must suffer and die. But the Christ also must rise. And this is what the Jeremiah like realists often miss. That this world is not all. If the John the Baptist Juliet romantics think overly much about the ability to change this fallen world. The Jeremiah’s in the midst of suffering can lose hope that there is something more. Both are overcome by the things of the this world. As Jesus would say to Peter, “You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

The true man – the son of man – suffers and dies. The Son of God – with our redeemed human nature – rises. And begins a new creation. God works not truly by reform, but by death and resurrection.

**Moral**

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and gospel’s will save it.”

That is the question before every Christian. Who do we say Christ is? Is he the one who works by death and resurrection. Including me? Or is the Christ something else. The one who can bring about a utopia. There are lots of those Christs. No utopia’s yet. Maybe all the Christs are false. It’s a false category. Slow train, never comes. Eat Drink and be merry, for tomorrow we all die. But then you have to explain the rising. Easter happened. It’s the only explanation for the following history. What inspired those apostles to walk the known world proclaiming a cross.

Are we willing to set our minds on the things of God? Does our Christ include both suffering and death, and resurrection? Are we willing to trust our lives to that Christ?

**Eschatological**

Because that is the content of the name Jesus Christ. He’s come to make all things new. Even if you gain everything in this world, it and you are headed to the fire. And it is only by the foolishness of faith that one escapes that fire.

Being Christlike, which is what we are all called to be – the be conformed to the likeness of Christ – includes a suffering and death. The death of our sinful self, the old Adam, all those desires attached strictly to the things of this world. If we would come after him, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow. If we would see the things of God – if we would see resurrection – we must pass through the sufferings and death.

Christ has secured us a passage. Before Christ, we did not know if there was a way. Christ has made a way past death. That is the content of the name Christ. It is victory, but not some temporary victory in a world passing away. But an eternal victory.

But we can only walk that path by faith. Today through the valley of the shadow. Tomorrow in new glory.

Is this your Christ? Or do you want another?