

Saying and doing

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Henry's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

Recently, a friend and I were talking about how disturbed and saddened we've been by the hateful and decidedly unchristian words spoken by self-proclaimed Christian leaders in recent years. The examples are too numerous to cite, and each has its own agenda of hatred and division. I complained that it was so deeply unfair that such intolerant and offensive perspectives were being allowed to speak for me and all other Christians.

My friend offered a profound and simple response: "Chris, they only speak for you if you don't speak for yourself."

Today's gospel lesson is not just an invitation for us to speak for ourselves but also a command to live out the truth we proclaim through acts of Christian discipleship. The question, "Who do you say that I am?" is closely related to the command to take up our cross and follow Jesus. The God we worship will determine the way we live, and the way we live is the best witness to the God we worship.

Of course, we live in a time when Jesus' question is answered in radically divergent ways, a time when some who profess faith in Jesus use that faith as a weapon of abuse or a fortress of isolation. We live in a time when the most amplified voices of faith are the most extreme and fanatical.

Now, more than perhaps anytime since the early Christian movement, it is critical that we have a clear and compelling answer to the question of who Jesus is. Dispassionate descriptions of the merely historical Jesus aren't enough; neither are domesticated pictures of Jesus more suited for bumper stickers and keychains than

life-changing discipleship.

While denominations like mine have tended to institutional maintenance and survey-taking, our platform has been burning. Jesus asks, then as now, “Who do you say that I am?” And Jesus commands us to follow that profession of faith with concrete actions of life-risking discipleship.