

Sunday, July 5, 2026 Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

“Who Is Jesus?” Pastor Takaaki Inoue

Matthew 16:13–17, Mark 16:1–8

❶ [On What Day of the Week Did the Resurrection Take Place?]

The other day, during my daily Bible reading, I read the passage about the Resurrection in the Gospel of Mark. Even though I read this passage every year at Easter, there was something I hadn’t noticed before. It says, “When the Sabbath was over” (16:1). In the Jewish calendar (the calendar of the Old Testament), the Sabbath is the seventh day—the day marking the end of the week. Therefore, from a Jewish perspective, the Resurrection took place on Monday. The Bible also refers to it as “the first day of the week” (Mark 16:2). Since this is the day following the seventh day, it is also called the eighth day (John 20:26). It suddenly occurred to me: If He was crucified on Friday, why did Christ wait three days to rise from the dead? Couldn’t He have risen right away the next day, Saturday (the Sabbath)? No matter how you look at it, the only conclusion I can draw is that He wanted to bring the old Sabbath to an end and prepare the new Sabbath. The early Christians observed both the old Sabbath (the seventh day) and the new Sabbath (the eighth day)—which was still a workday at that time. Eventually, they stopped observing the old Sabbath and began observing only the new Sabbath. The new Sabbath (Sunday) that we usually observe is the new Sabbath created by Christ—a day without death. It is not a day in the tradition of the Old Testament, that is, an extension of this world, but a day that came from above—a completely new day of the Kingdom of God. We are children of God.

❷ [Why Does It End with a Question?]

The Gospel of Mark has a mysterious ending. The angel told the women, “He is going ahead of you to Galilee... There you will see him” (Mark 16:7). The women were so terrified that they trembled and, having lost their wits, fled from the tomb without telling anyone anything. That’s where it ends. Mark does not provide an answer. Why is that? With an ending like this, who would believe in the resurrection? Mark did not write this to make people believe in the resurrection. Even for the first disciples, who saw the risen Christ, believing in the resurrection was difficult. Remember the travelers on the road to Emmaus. Their eyes were not opened until after the sermon and the breaking of bread. Mark did not want to tell people how the resurrection happened; he wanted them to know, “Who is this risen One?” The Bible tells us that knowing who Jesus is is what matters most. That is why it says, “Go back to the beginning of the Gospel and read it again.”

❸ [Answers from below, answers from above]

When Jesus went to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who

do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13). Caesarea Philippi was a coastal town that housed a temple built by Herod the Great in honor of the Roman emperor. The name “Caesarea” comes from “Caesar” (emperor) and means “the emperor’s city.” It is said that there were also temples dedicated to Greek gods there. The “Son of Man” refers to Jesus Himself and means “son of a human being.” It was significant that He asked this question in a town with a temple dedicated to the emperor. It was a question asking, “Whom do you worship?”

The disciples replied, “Some say ‘John the Baptist,’ others say ‘Elijah,’ and still others say ‘Jeremiah’ or ‘one of the prophets.’” Then Jesus asked, “But who do you say I am?” (16:15), and Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (16:16). “Son of the living God” means not merely a human being, but the child of the living God who has appeared in this world. Then Jesus said, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by a human being, but by my Father in heaven.” (16:17)

Why was he called Simon Bar-Jonah? This was his earthly name before he met Christ. “Peter” is the name Jesus gave him—“the name of the man who had come to faith”—and is akin to a baptismal name. This is similar to how Jacob was renamed Israel by God in the Old Testament. In the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, people are often addressed by their baptismal names rather than their birth names. During the Eucharist, when a believer kneels, the priest says, “Vasily [Name], Son of God, receive the Body and Blood of Christ.” Simon Bar-Jonah is the name of a limited, earthly person. In other words, it represents “humanity.” Jesus said, “It was the God in heaven who revealed this to you.” This means that such a confession could never have been made through human wisdom or strength alone. Having considered this so far, I think you can see that there are two kinds of confession regarding the person of Jesus Christ. The people of this world called Jesus “John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or a prophet,” but these are confessions from below—confessions that humans are capable of making. However, the confession, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” is a confession from above. This is called “revelation.”

●The teachings of the Unification Church are all derived from the bottom up. By observing all things in the universe—which are divided into male and female, positive and negative, and yang and yin—they concluded that God is a being of balanced male and female characteristics. This method of reaching a conclusion is called induction. It involves gathering all the horses that exist in this world, observing them, and drawing the conclusion that “a horse is...” Is God a harmonious blend of male and female? God transcends the created world. If we were to define God by earthly things, it would become an idol. The conclusions reached by cults, Islam, and Judaism regarding Jesus are all derived from a bottom-up perspective. Jesus the human being was one of the great prophets. He

was a great religious figure, educator, and liberator, standing alongside Ryōkan and Shinran. That is the Jesus viewed from a bottom-up perspective.

However, the church's confession of faith comes from revelation from above. It is something unilaterally taught by God from above. To borrow Paul's words, "The gospel I preached is not of human origin" (Galatians 1:11). It comes from God. There is a gulf between it and the world. Jesus said, "I will build my church on this rock" (16:18). This rock refers to Peter, but it also signifies the body of apostles represented by Peter; it means that the church is built upon their confession of faith. The church is built upon those who confess Christ as God, and it is not built upon those who do not confess Christ as God.

We are one with this Christ who came from above. We are one with the One who is both God and man, the One who is immortal and indestructible. Even though we understand this intellectually, we still feel anxious. Why is that?

●It happened last Thursday. After morning prayers, on my way home with my wife, we came across an elderly woman who was stuck at a crosswalk. Another woman had helped her get across the crosswalk, but she couldn't move from there. So I ended up carrying her on my back, and the three of us supported her all the way to her home. However, the elderly woman was afraid of being carried on my back, so she arched her back and clung to my shoulders with her long-nailed fingers. That really hurt. She kept saying, "I'm scared, I'm scared," and grabbed other parts of me with her hands. Since she didn't wrap her arms around my neck and was sticking her butt out, her weight shifted backward, making her feel even heavier. By the time we reached her house, I was drenched in sweat. I once heard a lecture on water rescue techniques at the Osaka YWCA. They said that when someone is drowning, you shouldn't jump in immediately to help. If you jump in right away, the person will cling to you out of fear, and both of you will drown. Instead, you should watch the situation for a while and wait until the drowning person's strength begins to wane before attempting a rescue. The point is that if they're tensing up, you won't be able to help them even if you want to. Tensing up comes from a lack of trust, while relaxing is an act of trust.

I realized that this old woman might actually be me.

In Zen, there is a saying: "A broken dipper with no handle and a bucket with a hole in the bottom." It means that people who are like a dipper with a proper handle that doesn't spill water, or a bucket with a solid bottom, are usually no good. In Japanese, the phrase "to know the bottom" implies "nothing special." Back when Miyakojima Church was poor and had only two members, I thought, "If things stay this way, the church will collapse. If I spend my life worrying about what others

think and suppressing my true self, I'll only be left with regrets. Since it's going to collapse anyway, I might as well do what I want and let it collapse that way," I thought. I think I'd lost my bottom. I let go of the desire to be seen favorably by others. I relaxed and freely enjoyed doing what I wanted to do. And then Christ took the burden upon Himself. Isn't that fine? I don't have to be a "respectable" person. I intend to do my best with what I can, joyfully trust in Christ completely, and share the Gospel.