

When we first moved to Greene County, I was surprised to find that a colony of Quakers once lived here. Quaker Knobs got its name from them, and the New Hope church building where they worshipped is still standing. Quakers were abolitionists. They helped establish the Underground Railroad that brought many slaves from the South into freedom. The few Quakers who owned slaves in Pennsylvania freed them in 1788 long before the Emancipation Proclamation. Some of those Quakers moved here from the Keystone State. Quakers believed that churches got too hung up on doctrinal disputes. The result, from their viewpoint, was a lot of useless arguing over who was right and who was wrong at the expense of living a life that reflected the life of Christ.

George Fox, founder of the Quakers, or as they are called now the Society of Friends, once said, "You will say, 'Christ says this,' or 'The apostles say that,'" but what do you say? Are you a child of the light and have you walked in the light?" Fox and his friends had made up their minds about Jesus. They decided he was the one, and therefore worth following. We know this not only because of what the Quakers said, but especially by the way they lived.

Ms. Zelphyr was a widow in one of the churches I served before coming here. She was especially well known for her chicken and dumplings. You could count on her to bring them to

every covered dish dinner. I never tasted them because I was still under the illusion that the noble thing for the minister to do was always to go last in line. That was dumb. But our children confirmed that her dumplings were tops. Ms. Zelphyr made those dumplings well into her 80s as an act of love for her church family. Because her body was old and tired, she had to cook them in stages. It took great effort, and some pain, but she thought we were worth it.

I also appreciated Ms. Zelphyr's refusal to gossip. She lived almost in the same yard with her extended family, which was a blessing and a curse: a blessing because they loved her and would look after her; a curse because they often sat in the yard and criticized the behavior of anybody they could think of, including the preacher. When that started, Ms. Zelphyr would get up in protest, fold her lawn chair and go inside her little house, saying to herself as she went, "Judge not, lest ye be judged. Judge not...." Where did she get that? Zelphyr had made up her mind about Jesus. She thought he was the Way, the Truth and the Life. And we know this, not only because she came to church every single Sunday, paid her offering and studied her Sunday School lesson, but also because of the self-giving, kind nature of her life, which she picked up from her Master.

John the Baptist had heard about the growing ministry of Jesus. He was probably in prison at the time. So he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus a question. "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" In the gospel of Luke, Jesus and John had not yet talked to each other, not even at Jesus' baptism. John didn't know for sure who Jesus was. He was asking in hope from behind the bars of his cell, "Are you the Messiah, the one who will turn the world right side up?"

It would have been a lot easier on all of us if Jesus had given John a straight answer, either "Yes, I am," or "No, I'm not." Instead, Jesus catalogued his activities and sent back John's disciples to report. "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight; the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed; the deaf hear; the dead are raised; and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed are those who take no offense at me." In other words, Jesus was doing some wonderful things, but John would have to take stock of Jesus' ministry, and answer the Messiah question for himself.

The question at hand, as one skillful interpreter puts it, isn't whether or not Jesus can do all the things he has listed. A lot of time has been wasted debating whether Jesus did or didn't, could or couldn't do miracles, with neither side closer to living a grace filled life after all the feathers stop flying. The question posed by

the text is: are these the kinds of things a Messiah does? Is Jesus fulfilling the role of savior of the world? John had to make up his own mind about that. Jesus couldn't answer for him. And John's answer had to come not only with his words, but also from the kind of life he lived, even if he was in prison. You can't say yes or no to the Messiah question, the Savior question, without pointing your life in a certain direction, like the Quakers did and Ms. Zelphyr.

What expectations do we have for a Savior? We expect our Savior to forgive our sins, to be a strength, comfort and guide, and to deliver us from death into eternal life. The Bible is full of promises that our Savior gives these very gifts. And we aren't wrong to believe in them because they meet some of our deepest needs as God's precious, fallen creatures. But Jesus' description of his ministry exceeds our common expectations. It includes breaking powers that oppress people, bridging gaps between outcasts and insiders, giving life back in this world to those who have lost it. The Jesus who came to comfort us is also the liberator, who comes to undo injustice, even when it causes discomfort. The Jesus who forgives also includes in his family those who have been excluded for too long, though some family members will struggle to understand. The Jesus who brings us to heaven also reclaims the earth. He comes to set the world, the whole creation in fact, to rights.

If we believe in him, we also join his cause. The description of his ministry becomes the map for our action. The church doesn't replace the savior, but we reflect him in our work. We can't re-free slaves, or reproduce Zelphyr's chicken and dumplings. But we can live a life that proclaims we've made up our minds. Jesus is the one. And blessed are those who point their lives in his direction.

"Are you the Messiah, or should we wait for another?"

Sometimes I find myself still looking for another savior. I must not be entirely convinced that Jesus will accomplish whatever needs to be accomplished to set things right because I'm still vulnerable to other promise makers and programs. When this new theology or the next leadership approach comes down the pike, or when I think I've stumbled on a captivating model for what the church could be, I put too much stock in it. It's not that I've learned everything I need to know, and therefore should ignore fresh visions and insights. What's wrong is the inordinate trust and hope I put in these things, as if I might have finally found something that will heal all wounds and make everything alright. But we already have someone who will heal all wounds and set the world straight. So the issue isn't whether I've found the Savior yet, but if I will follow the one God has given, if will make up my mind that he has come and I need not look any further.

Are you the Messiah, or should we keep on looking? Some are still looking for that magic insight; a theory of everything to explain the way things are and finally put our questions to rest. And we will be at peace, I suppose, because we know it all. Does that make sense to you, or does Wendell Berry make more sense when he says the increase of knowledge only increases the boundaries of what we don't know.

Then others are hoping to be saved by medical breakthroughs unlike anything we have seen, perhaps a way to flush aging from our cells so that nothing in us ever grows old. You can decide for yourself if being us forever sounds like salvation. Though I enjoy being alive, it sounds pretty tedious to me. I hope we cure Alzheimer's and many other diseases that devastate patients and their families. But do we think we can save ourselves with medicine?

Looking for a savior even works its way into politics. Maybe this candidate will be the one either to make us safe, or to make us kind; to heal divisions or stand for the truth; to bring order or protect the vulnerable. And of course, we want whoever is president to fix the economy. By the way, has there ever been a time when something wasn't wrong with the economy that we wanted to president to fix? Jesus may take care of the spiritual realm, but we keep looking for someone else to handle the rest.

When we make up our minds that Jesus is the one, we stop looking for other saviors. It's not that we think we have all the answers and don't need new vision and insight. But we focus on being children of the light and walking in the light of Christ. We are no longer easily taken off course by other Messiahs, whether they walk on two legs or exist as ideas in our minds. We show our answer by pointing our lives in a certain direction. Others need to see his life living in us so they, too, can make up their minds.

I believe we're never quite finished making up our minds about Jesus. What I meant when I acknowledged him to be the one when I was twelve was different from what I meant when I was 25, which is different from what I mean now. The call of Christ draws us to ever deepening layers of discipleship. I rest in God's love. I never feel I'm in danger of losing that love. But God's love keeps asking for more and more of my life so that I say yes to Jesus with my whole being.

I heard about an international organization of Christians that shares resources, similar to what we hear about in the second chapter of Acts. Members of this organization pool their resources, not all of their resources, but what they can afford. Then, as needs arise among them, they have a mechanism in place for distributing those resources so that no one in the group ever has to go without food, medical treatment or other basic needs.

I'm fascinated by them. I don't think I'll sign up soon, but what a powerful witness in the lives they are living for each other. I don't doubt for a second that they have made up their minds about Jesus, do you?

Are you the one, or should we look for someone else? Time to answer for ourselves, not only with words, but by the trajectory of our lives.