



4TH SUNDAY OF LENT MARCH 11, 2018

SERMON TITLE: **WHO IS JESUS TO YOU?**
SCRIPTURES: **Matthew 16:13-20**
PREACHER **REV. KELVIN SAULS**

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Reader: Word of God for the People of God
All: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION

Life is full of questions. We are asked a lot of questions over the courses of our lives. We can't even buy a coffee in most places, it seems, without an inquisition. "What kind of coffee—Espresso, Americano, Latte, Mocha, Frappuccino?" "What size—small, medium or large. And yet, perhaps surprisingly for those who take their coffee very seriously, there are also a lot of other, more important questions we are asked over the courses of our lives, the answers to which are potentially life-changing; questions like: "Will you marry me?" "Why should we give you this job?" "Can you show me where it hurts?" In today's Gospel reading, Jesus puts before his disciples a question the answer to which was not only life-changing but eternal life-changing. He puts it before us as well: "Who do you say that the Son of Man?" (i.e. that I am?) There is no more important question we have to answer in our lives than that. By our answer to that one question this church will stand or fall, indeed the whole Church will stand or fall. "Who do you say that I am?" Be careful how you respond, the mission of the Church depends upon it.

Then Jesus went a little further. He turned the question on them: "And what about *you*?" he said. "Who do *you* say that I am?" There was a deathly hush. You could have heard a pin drop. Finally, Simon, becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the silence blurts something out. "You are the Christ," he says, "the Son of the living God." "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah," But Jesus replies and says, "This isn't ordinary book knowledge, only God can give this kind of insight."

Faith is a gift. It is God alone who gives us the grace to see who Jesus is. Ours is a revelatory faith. We come to know God only because God comes to make himself known to us. Before emerging as the great hymn-writer, preacher and leader of the 18th century Methodist revival, Charles Wesley became aware that there was something seriously lacking in his faith—a personal knowledge of who Jesus was to him. Already a preacher, he tried preaching himself into such faith. But he couldn't. If he could, he would, and he tried. But he couldn't. Faith is not something we go out and get out for ourselves, faith is something God gives us.

“Who do you say that I am?” Jesus still asks his disciples the same question. Do we know him as the Christ—as our Saviour, the King whose job it is to rescue and restore the whole world to God, who came to tackle not simply the symptoms of sin and evil, but the root cause of it—the selfishness and greed and inwardness which is so ingrained in us and which we so often do not even notice? Do we know him as the Son of the living God—as God in the flesh, as Lord and Master of all, the one whom we not only love but choose to obey in love, whose ways we follow not simply because they profit us but because they are *his* ways and because that is reason enough.

Peter's confession didn't come out of the blue; it came from spending time with Jesus, as a gift of God's own self-revealing. So it will for us also. Spending time with Jesus is the only way we get to know who he really is. So are we doing that? Are we meeting him regularly where he may be found—in prayer, in reading the Bible, in the Eucharist, in acts of loving service?

Who we say that Jesus is matters. Who we think Jesus is will affect how we relate to him and what place we allow him to have in our lives. If we think of Jesus as the epitome of Mr Nice Guy, our discipleship will just consist in trying our best to be 'nice'. If we think of Jesus as just a great moral teacher from yester-year, we might take some of his teachings on board, but we won't let him take control of our lives in the here and now, reshaping us and saving us from the sin that comes so naturally to us.

The Jesus the world needs is Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God. The only Jesus who can redeem the world is God incarnate, who goes to the Cross on our behalf to save us from our sin and to follow whom means taking up our own cross and having our self-seeking, self-will and self-centeredness crucified with him in order to live the lives God has for us. Are we as shaky as sand or solid as a rock?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & CONVERSATION

- Who do you say Jesus is?
- How does your declaration of Jesus inform, instruct and inspire application of what it means to follow Jesus?
- Why did Jesus sternly order the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah?