

**A sermon preached at St. Michael and All Angels' Church,
Sandhurst on Sunday 27th August 2017 by Emma Hodge**

Readings: Matthew 16:13-20; Isaiah 51:1-6; Psalm 122

Speak Lord, your servants are listening, you have the words of eternal life. Amen

Those of you who are, or have been teachers, will know that one way to engage students is by asking questions on the topic you want to teach on and to start out with a fairly easy question. Our gospel passage today shows Jesus doing exactly this, Jesus asks his disciples this question "Who do people say that the son of man is?" A simple question to start some teaching from Jesus about the things that would happen to him in Jerusalem.

But before we look at what follows this question, let's look at the background, as it provides insight into some of the answers.

Immediately before this passage, Jesus had been at the Sea of Galilee when he was approached again by Jewish leaders – the Pharisees and Sadducees - who had been sent to test him, to try and trick him into giving an answer which they could take to the authorities so that they could execute him. Once the Pharisees and Sadducees had left, Jesus continued teaching his disciples but, as was often the case, they did not fully understand some of the teaching which Jesus gave them. They then move away to the Non-Jewish or Gentile region of Caesarea Philippi where Jesus would continue to spend time teaching them.

Jesus started this period of time with his disciples with a relatively easy question – what are other people saying? St. Matthew phrases his question by asking "who do people say that the son of man is?" whereas in both St Mark and St Luke Gospels, both state that the question which Jesus asks is "Who do people say that I am" both of course are the same question, with different emphasis.

The disciples are able to answer this question by providing different responses, showing that people did not fully know who Jesus was, it hadn't been revealed to them. No disciple said that people were saying that the 'Son of Man' was Jesus.

Jesus then moves on and asks the group the harder question “Who do you say that I am?”

In answer to the previous question, we don't know who answered, which could indicate that several disciples offered up answers, but in answer to this question only one disciple answered, Peter.

Peter is one of the disciples, and one of the inner circle of three disciples, and yet he is someone very much on a journey of faith as at times he gets it very wrong, such as denying Jesus after he was arrested, but then, in this morning's passage, he shows that he can get it right and have been blessed with having received the knowledge that Jesus is the messiah (however he doesn't fully understand even then).

Peter, often a spokesman for the group, is the one that answers Jesus's second and more challenging question. He responds showing that he had received the revelation from God the Father, that Jesus is the Messiah, but Peter's expectation (and other Jewish people at the time would have shared in this expectation) was that the Messiah was someone who was coming to save the Jewish people from oppression, someone who would be capable of over-throwing the Roman authorities, but this is not the kind of Messiah that Jesus is.

The answer Peter gave “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God” is not very shocking to us, we have the benefit of knowing what happens, of having the benefit of hindsight and of two millennia of thought and insight into Jesus being the messiah, but to the other disciples hearing Peter's revelation, especially those who were still struggling with some of Jesus teaching, this was far more revolutionary.

This answer came from Peter's heart, God the father had opened Peter's heart to this revelation and Jesus acknowledges this fact. Jesus responds to Peter's words with praise and the words “Upon this rock I will build my church” and Jesus' response has been widely examined by scholars and depending upon which Christian denomination and tradition, the answer and insights mean different things, however I am going to explore the meaning that the **rock** is not the person of Peter (the Roman Catholic view), but rather the **words** which Peter said. “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God”

The words which Peter says illustrate the depth of his faith and every single one of us can also experience this depth of faith. The disciples, including Peter, had been struggling to fully comprehend Jesus teaching, that he was the person who had been sent by God to save the world from their sins.

The word Messiah means anointed one; someone who is set aside by God; but Peter did not just proclaim Jesus as someone anointed by God but he went on to say more, he said that he was the Son of the Living God. Words which show the depth and very unique and personal relationship between God and Jesus, and the acknowledgement that God has a plan, as Jesus would explain later in the chapter (come back next week for part 2!).

If we now turn our attention to what the passage means to us,

Jesus asked his disciples “Who do you say that I am?” or in other words “Who is Jesus?”

If you were asked the question “Who is Jesus?” by a friend, a family member, a colleague, how would you respond?

You may want to respond in a very general way, saying that he was a Jewish preacher and religious leader who became the central figure in Christianity. While that answer is not wrong, it is not really correct either because Jesus is more than that.

Jesus is God’s only son, who was born of a woman in Bethlehem and died for our sins, he then rose again after three days to prove that there is life after death. Well this may be a better answer but again I am going to say that it is not enough

It doesn’t mention anything about the relationship that we have with Jesus. That relationship will be different for each one of us but each one of us can and should take time to develop it, to find out more about Jesus, to come to know him more dearly, to let the relationship grow and develop just as our human relationships do. But is this enough?

Peter’s answer went further, he went and said that Jesus was the Anointed one, the holy one, the son of the living God. The depth of faith that Peter showed in his answer is not limited to just Peter. Millions of people

throughout history and across the world, people like you and me, have joined in with Peter's response as he proclaims Jesus importance, the Son of the Living God, the person who is alive and has a relationship with us, who has come to save us. This depth of faith is the basis, the rock or cornerstone to build our lives on. Having a solid foundation is essential to get everything done as our relationship with Jesus affects every aspect of our lives and is not related to just Sunday.

If Jesus asked us "Who do you say that I am?" how would we respond, would we answer, like Peter did, with certainty and conviction, that Jesus is Lord, our Messiah, the son of the Living God, who was sent by God to save us and give us eternal life, someone we have a personal relationship with?

As we come to the altar this morning to receive either Holy Communion or a blessing, can I suggest that we take the time to acknowledge who Jesus is to us?