

Who am I ?

13 9 15

God, who in generous mercy sent your Holy Spirit
upon your Church in the burning fire of your love:
grant that your people may be fervent
in the fellowship of the gospel
that, always abiding in you,
they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service.

Our text may be found in today's gospel from Mark – chapter 8 and verse 27:

'Who do people say I am ?'

Do you ever stand in front of a mirror, look at your reflection and ask yourself the question, 'Who am I ?' It's a great question . . . and I guess if I were to be succinct, I'd simply say of me that I'm a son, a brother and a father. I am my parents' son; I am my brother's younger brother; and I am a father though I am unmarried and without children – I'm a father in a spiritual sense of the word !

Jesus, here in the middle of Mark's gospel, is asking the question, 'Who am I ?' but he asks it in a slightly different way. **'Who do people say I am ?'** Then he asks **'But who do you say I am ?'** and the answers we hear are insightful because they tell us how people saw Jesus at that particular moment in time. Mark's gospel is inviting us to reflect on who Jesus is by hearing his story and by seeing how different folk reacted to Jesus, to what he taught and to what he did.

So let's look at the first question, 'Who do people say I am?' We hear three possibilities: John the Baptist; Elijah, or one of the prophets. Great answers because they suggest someone who is spiritually very exciting. John the Baptist is dead, beheaded by Herod Antipas; Elijah is long-gone, not dead exactly but taken up into heaven by a chariot of fire and thought to be coming again to announce the coming of the Messiah; or, thirdly, a prophet in the vein of one of the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Hosea or Amos.

The second question invites the disciples to answer for themselves. Jesus asks, 'But who do you say I am?' and Peter affirms what the Twelve must have felt and known – he simply states the truth as they saw it: 'You are the Messiah' and of course Peter's dead right. The whole point of Mark's gospel is to point us to this fact – that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, our Saviour.

But what is curious here is what happens next: having articulated the truth, Jesus goes on to spell out what in truth it means for him to be the Messiah and it's not that nice, not that pleasant, not much fun. Jesus says: 'the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again' and poor Peter is appalled that his friend and teacher is going to suffer in such a way. Moved by love, motivated by friendship, Peter tries to protect Jesus and gets put in his place by him in no uncertain terms – 'Get behind me Satan!'

It is a sad fact that the cross is what awaits Jesus in Jerusalem. It is a sad fact that he's going to have to die a painful and humiliating death before he rises in glory

and it is a sad fact that each of us had our own particular cross to bear. What that might mean for me and what that might mean for you could well be the subject of our reflection this week.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 32 : Who am I

