

## Who am I ?

27 8 17

O God, you declare your almighty power  
most chiefly in showing mercy and pity:  
mercifully grant to us such a measure of your grace,  
that we, running the way of your commandments,  
may receive your gracious promises,  
and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure.

Our text may be found in the gospel according to Matthew, chapter 16, verse 15

‘ . . . who do you say that I am ?’

Do you ever ask the question, ‘Who am I ?’

‘Who am I ?’ is a great, existential question, posing the question about who exactly we are; what we are; what we are doing here. I guess it’s the sort of question we’d ask when we were young, finding our way in the world, seeking our identity, asking what it means for me to be me. And, sadly, it might be the sort of question we’d ask towards the end of our lives when we’re beginning to lose the plot, perhaps at the onset of Alzheimers ?

Whatever the case, in our case here, for Jesus the question is one he’s asking not because he doesn’t know the answer but he’s checking out whether his disciples, his twelve companions, know who he truly is.

In Matthew, what we've just heard takes place over two thirds of the way through his gospel so here in chapter 16, in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus is taking some downtime with the Twelve, well away from the crowds of fellow Jews, hungry to hear him and to be healed by him. It's a chance to be alone together and talk and pray. First, Jesus asks them who other people think he is and there's the nice idea that Jesus is John the Baptist resurrected from the dead. Having had his head chopped off by Herod, John has come back again to annoy him some more. Then, there is the idea that Jesus is Elijah or Jeremiah, both great Jewish prophets who both, in their own way, might be forerunners of their long-expected Messiah. Or perhaps Jesus is simply the latest in a long line of prophets who for last couple of hundred years had been sadly lacking back then.

Then Peter, inspired, blurts out what all the Twelve must know by now: **'You are the Messiah, the son, of the living God.'** Dead right and Jesus agrees, patting Peter on the back for being inspired enough to say so.

Then, a pun on his name. Peter, as you will probably remember, was named Simon by his mum and dad at his circumcision but when he first meets Jesus, Jesus nicknames him Peter, which means rock. And now, here, he says Peter is the rock on which the church will be built. And, as a bonus Peter, will be given the keys of the kingdom.

Don't you love it ! But there a sting in the tail that is not part of today's gospel so I won't mention a serious diss that Jesus is just about to give Peter so you'll have to come back next week to hear it again.

But in this passage, we have one of the differences in interpretation between Catholics and Protestants. For Catholics, the passage points to Peter being the first bishop of Rome and to Peter has been given the means by which we all as Christians may enter heaven. For Protestants, Peter is an example for us all as Christians. An example of the need to come to a personal faith and for us, in turn, to be doorkeepers to those with whom we come in contact so that we can show them the way though the door of faith into the life of the world to come.

Well, however you make sense of what you believe, however you may interpret this passage, what is clear beyond doubt is that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed Son of God, God incarnate, in the flesh, the one who has come show us the way to salvation.

And my prayer for all of us here today is that we, like Peter, may have a real faith in God's Son, our Saviour and that we each, in our own way, help others on their spiritual journey to Him.

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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