

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday 15 September, 2024 – 16th Sunday after Trinity
Reading – Mark 8:27-38

As they were traveling on the outskirts of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do people say I am?” If I got up here this morning and asked, “What are people saying about me?” you would think that either I have a poor self-esteem and desperately need affirmation or I am a bit conceited and arrogant. But surely Jesus cannot have a poor self-esteem or be conceited or arrogant unless we choose to focus on his humanity like Revd. Jon argued last week.

After listening to their answers, Jesus moves on to what the disciples personally believe about him. Jesus asks, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” These are the men whom Jesus had hand-picked to be his disciples. For 2½ years they had been with Jesus every single day.

We see each other on Sunday mornings when we are at our very best behaviours. And if people asked about me, you probably would say, “She is a wonderful person.” But come live with me for 2½ years, and then see what you’ll say.

Jesus turns to these men who have seen him at his best when his divine nature is displayed and he is honoured and praised by the people witnessing his miracles and marvelling at the power of God at work in him. They have also seen him at his worst when being attacked and berated by the religious leaders, and Jesus asks, “But who do you say I am?” Peter answered for the twelve, “You are the Messiah.” In just a few simple words Peter makes a statement known as the Great Confession. Peter said, “Jesus, you are the Messiah.”

This changed the story from who Jesus is to why Jesus came. What does it mean that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah? Jesus tells us the plain, unvarnished truth about his messiahship. Vs.31 says, “He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things ...” The disciples got Jesus’ identity right but they had no idea that the mission of this Messiah is about suffering, that this is a dying Messiah, a Christ who embraces death. Jesus speaks plainly about his suffering and death and Peter does not like what he hears. He takes Jesus to one side and we can imagine him saying, “Don’t say things like this. It will upset your followers.” Peter has just heard for the first time that his Lord and dear friend is going to be executed. His immediate reaction is, “There’s no way that I’m going to let this happen!” I don’t know about you, but I can sympathize with Peter.

Some of you may know that I have a daughter who is not my biological daughter. She was left with me when she was just 20 days old by her mother – a total stranger who claimed she is my brother’s child and I have raised her. She is now 34 years old. From about age 4, I will sit her on my laps and tell her that though she calls me mummy, she has another mummy who may show up one day. She will go into a frenzy blocking her ears with her hands crying, “Please don’t tell me such cruel things.” Sometimes, like that 4 year-old, the truth is not what we want to hear.

But, Jesus will not be diverted from the truth, so he said to Peter, “Get behind me Satan.” Matthew 16:23 tells us that Peter, at that point was acting like a stumbling

block to Jesus. Peter was at that moment obstructing God's plan to save the world. He was not thinking about the things of God, but the things of men. Men wanted a king. God wanted a Saviour. Peter was not considering God's purposes but only his own human desires and feelings. Peter wanted Christ to be king but not the suffering servant.

Maybe Jesus remembered his temptation in the wilderness and how Satan tried to entice him and he hears Satan's voice again through his chief disciple so his response was absolutely uncompromising. It may sound harsh to call Peter Satan, but I think Jesus was saying, "Peter, it's not your place to tell me what to do. Your place is to follow me, so get in line behind me."

The path this Messiah follows is a pathway of opposition, of hostility, of rejection and ultimately death. It is necessary for him to suffer, it cannot be avoided. Jesus says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

I wonder this morning, what Jesus, the Messiah mean to you and to me. I will leave us with 4 questions to ponder through the week.

1. Who do we say Jesus is?
2. What does it mean that he is Christ, the suffering servant?
3. What does it mean to deny self and take up our cross?
4. How willing are we to follow Jesus especially when it means turning away from or giving up the pleasures of this world?

We pray for God to prune our priorities and restore his image in us. Amen.

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