



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

11th Sunday after Trinity ~ August 23rd 2020

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

We are resuming some of our Church services with socially distancing, and will maintain, for the foreseeable future, our zooming, emailing and leaflet deliveries; we want people to have a genuine choice.

St Peter's: Sundays 8am & 11am ~ Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's: Sundays 9.15am

St John's: Sundays 9:30am ~ Tuesdays 10am

Please Note:

Except for medical reasons (and those under 11) we are now required to wear a face mask in our church buildings.

Prayers for this Week

Living God, you sent your Son among us to reveal your wisdom and make known your ways. Increase our faith, that we may confess Jesus as your Son, take up his work on earth, and trust his promise to sustain the Church. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Living God, you accept our stumbling faith, our misplaced answers, our false horizons, and through them build a way of peace: empower us to bind the wounds of the world and loose the debts of oppression, that all may confess the grace that is your work alone; through Jesus Christ, anointed for the world. **Amen.**

Reading: Matthew 16 v13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' And 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. And 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. I 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.' Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Meditation

There is much in today's quite short reading. It has been very significant in the life of the Church, for it is one of the foundational verses of the Bible that has been used to justify the position and role of the Pope (as the presumed successor of Peter), the power of the church to make rules and laws, and the ability of the church through its priests to pronounce God's forgiveness. All these are, of course, still debated, and maybe today's Bible reading cannot always bear the weight of the consequences drawn from it. It is also true that the very familiarity of the reading sometimes takes away from the unexpected, and perhaps shocking, claims it seems to make. Let's take another direction with this reading today to start with and see where it takes us.

Let's be reminded of the end; he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah, before we go to the beginning; Jesus asks his disciples 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'

They give perfectly reasonable answers, undoubtedly the answers that "people" had been giving, and Jesus seems to have asked them more as an opinion poll rather than to give their own views. But, now, he asks this second more focussed question to all the disciples, 'But who do you say that I am?' The question has changed in two ways; originally it was about "people" now the disciples, but equally significantly it has changed from being about who the Son of Man is, to who am I!

Son of Man, or son of man? In the New Testament the phrase is always (with one exception – see below) on the lips of Jesus, and seems to be a favoured way he chooses to refer to himself. Remember Jesus's scripture is what we call the Old Testament. In the Old Testament son of man is often a synonym for "man" i.e., a human being. Traditionally 'Son of Man' is held to signify especially the humility of Christ's incarnate humanity. So, in some ways Jesus could be seen to be saying of himself, - I am human, just like all of you. Son of Man is contrasted with the majesty of His Divinity denoted by 'Son of God'.

When the question is seemingly rephrased and refocussed, to 'Who do you say that I am?' Simon answers first, and it seems quickly and instinctively. 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' and receives a blessing and is renamed "the Rock", Peter. But what of Peter's renaming of Jesus, Son of the living God. Again this gives a choice of two emphases. It could be that Peter picks up on the "I am" of the question, and it reminds him of when Moses seeks God's identity and gets the answer, 'I am who I am'. Well I talked about that with names a few weeks back (2nd August), so will not repeat what I wrote there. If Peter picks up this resonance, then he is saying that Jesus is one and the same as the God of Israel, who led, leads and continues to lead his people, YHWH. And that one of the characteristics of God is that he is God who is still active, engaged and involved with his people. God is not a God of the past, a God who has acted, but a living God. And if the idea bears weight then God is a God who lives a life with different phases. For just as we are the same person as a baby, toddler, adolescent, middle and old age, but people who come to know us at different stages have very different pictures and relationships with us, and that also depends at what stages of our life we are at as to how we relate. We should not let this insight carry more weight than it can bear; for I am not saying that God went through a process of growing up and learning and developing as we do, but that the authentic experience of God in different centuries is different and is meant to be different, but God is always the same person.

The second emphasis, that Peter could be picking up, is saying that God is the God of the living, i.e., not the God of the dead. This could be saying that the most important way of knowing God is in the present, and not for possible reward in the future after death, and that life now is important. That what you do with your life now is of immense significance, and it cannot be simply taken as a prelude of glory to come, or as the inevitable consequence of the creation of the human society we happen to be located in. Again, this should not be made to bear more than it is able, for there is the important reality of hope. Perhaps in this light, we need to remember that the

Hebrew YHWH can mean equally 1. I am who I am, 2, I will be who I will be, 3. I am who I will be, or 4. I will be who I am.

But we must skip to the punchline of today's gospel. 'he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.' Son of Man also emphasises Jesus' universalist role in contrast with the nationalist conceptions associated with the title 'Son of David' or Messiah. Jesus may not be saying to keep silent about who I am, but saying do not think of me as the Jewish Messiah with all its territorial, national, military or priestly overtones. Jesus calls himself Son of Man, or human being. He blesses Peter for calling him "Son of the living God", but commands him not to say Jesus is the Messiah. So, we need to be perpetually reminded that Jesus is human too; to wrestle with the consequences of him being alive, and to discard nationalistic, narrow and warrior identities of him.

(The exception, Acts 7v56, interestingly for you to think about, is on the lips of Stephen, the first Christian martyr who uses it at his moment of death as he sees a vision of where he is going. There is also an interestingly similar heavenly vision in the Old Testament in Daniel 7v13.

*Daniel 7 v13 I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One
Acts 7 v56 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!')*

God bless, Andrew

Prayers

We pray for strength to follow Jesus.
Saviour, we hear your call, help us to follow.

Jesus said; "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant." Renew your Church in love and faithfulness; and help us to serve you with joy.

Jesus said; "Unless you change and become like little children you can never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Let not the needy be forgotten; nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Jesus said; "Blessed are the humble; they will receive what God has promised." Make us instruments of your peace; and let your glory be over all the earth.

Jesus said; "Be merciful as the Father is merciful; love your enemies and do good to them." Make your ways known upon earth, Lord God; your saving power among all peoples.

Jesus said; "Love one another as I have loved you; there is no greater love than this, to lay down your life for your friends." Guide the leaders of this and every nation; that justice may prevail throughout the world.

Jesus said; "Go to people everywhere and make them my disciples and I will be with you to the end of time." Saviour, we hear your call, help us to follow.

God of mercy, you know us and love us and hear our prayer: keep us in the eternal fellowship of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.