**Who is Jesus?**

**Sunday 23rd August 2020 – 11th Sunday after Trinity**

Exodus 1:8-2:10

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 16:13-20

May the words of my lips and the meditations of my heart be acceptable unto you O Lord. Amen.

Where we come from can be important.

Last week we went to see my brother Chris, he is one of a very few people alive who remembers my mum. We started to talk about how few photos and memorabilia we have of her, as she died nearly 50 years ago when we were both young. It was good to talk about her with someone who knew her.

My dad also taught me a lot. He was brought up in poor circumstances and both his parents died by the time he was 15.

He must have learned a lot from them. He had friends who gave him a job, his first job was delivering meat for a family of butchers, he remained friends with them all his life and Chris and I are still in touch with the family.

Later on, my dad became very successful but he never forgot his roots, he regularly went to see his friends and my grandmother, his mother-in-law, until he died.

Chris and I both have friends from when we were at school, we have followed my dad’s example.

In our Exodus reading we see what happens when a new king comes into power who does not know Joseph. He saw that the Israelites were becoming more numerous and powerful and he was afraid.

Fear led to some bad decisions by the new king, he did not know or did not remember how Joseph had saved Egypt.

But we also read that the midwives feared God, and God dealt well with them and blessed them, and so begins the story of Moses, to whom God would reveal himself and give the 10 commandments.

In the Bible people are often described as being the son of, and in our reading today Jesus says “blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah”.

**Where we come from is important, but it must not define who we are.**

For many people the past is not a good place. It is a hard place, a place of bad memories which continue to impact on their lives today.

Refugees, children who are abused and children in care, children who are carers, children with medical needs, all of them may also struggle with life today as a result of their past.

We should be helping people where we can. Mental health is rightly higher on the agenda today, and few of us go through life unscathed.

Kent is having more refugees arriving than ever before, some of them are escaping torture, prison and death for a number of different reasons.

In our Matthew reading Jesus asks “who do people say that the Son of Man is?

The Son of Man is a title that Jesus gives himself, it is never a title that others use to address him, unless they are repeating the phrase that Jesus himself used.

Its roots are in Daniel 7: 13-14 which says “in my vision I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

Matthew’s gospel is for the Gentiles as well as the Jews and the reference to Daniel, which talks about all peoples, nations and men of every language fits in with Matthew’s theology.

It is, however, a title used more in other gospels. R.T. France comments that “Matthew’s use of the term … derived from the conviction that those verses provided a pattern which it was Jesus mission to fulfil”.

It is also interesting that this takes place in Caesarea Philippi which is a non-Jewish area.

Jesus is not asking who the disciples think that he is at this juncture, he is asking what the wider world thinks.

Our message is for that world, and many people have yet to hear it, the current pandemic appears to have made people more open to thinking about spiritual matters, but we need to harness this interest and work with it.

The reply from the disciples is that people see Jesus as a prophet.

Then comes the crunch question.

Who do you say that I am?

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” says Peter.

We often consider how strange it is that Peter, who is human and makes mistakes, is the rock on which Jesus chooses to build his church.

He doesn’t choose Peter because he makes mistakes.

He chooses Peter because Peter recognises and proclaims that Jesus is the son of the living God.

Spiritual insight.

The other disciples probably had that insight too but Peter, as we know all too well, is impetuous and goes right out and says it.

Peter had a past, but his statement of who Jesus was defined his present and Jesus gave him the keys, the authority, to build the church.

Peter still made mistakes, but he went on to fulfil the role that Jesus gave him, as we have been looking at in Acts during our Bible study.

Whatever our past, if we proclaim Jesus as Lord, Jesus gives us a future in his kingdom, even if we make mistakes.

Who do you say that I am? – the question that changed Peter’s life.

It can change our lives when we acknowledge Jesus as Lord, if we let it.

It was Peter’s testimony, his knowledge and experience of the living God which gave him the keys to the Kingdom, and it is our individual testimony that continues to build that Kingdom.

Our combined testimonies create our community, our church, God’s church here on earth. We all have a part to play in that church.

Our Romans reading urges us to be living sacrifices.

We need to be willing to be living sacrifices, serving a living God.

We all have different gifts, according to the grace given to us. Romans mentions:

Prophesying – predicting the future or knowing the will of God in a situation

Serving

Teaching – we all learn from each other

Encouragement – this is a very undervalued gift. I have been in receipt of encouragement from many of you and from others in different ways during my training and I can assure you that encouragement is a wonderful gift to have.

Contributing to the needs of others – this may be practically, financially, spiritually, emotionally

Leadership

Mercy, or compassion as the NRSV puts it. This is another undervalued gift, having compassion on others, be they refugees or other Christians, goes a long way to building fellowship.

Cheerfulness – it is real gift to be cheerful, and to spread that cheerfulness.

Where we come from may be important, but it does not define who we are in Jesus. If we acknowledge Him as Lord, He gives us the keys to the Kingdom, what gifts are we going to use this week to open those doors for others?

Amen.