

Lay-reader Karen's reflection for S. Peter's Day: 28th June 2026

Today's text: Matthew 16.13 – 19

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."

Reflection

Hindsight, they say, is a wonderful thing. "If I knew then what I know now...."; "If only I'd known that before...."; If only I'd known what the reading was before I agreed to preach today....

It, hindsight, is a gift which most of us share; a gift which God in his wisdom has bestowed on most human beings. Perhaps it is hindsight which sets us apart from other animals....

Be that as it may, hindsight is often a cruel mistress too. How many of us have not agonised at some time or another, "O I wish I'd done xyz", or "I shouldn't have said...."? Indeed, her closest friends seem to be If Only, and Should've.

Wonderful thing she may be, but we do also have to treat her with more than a little respect.

And if you are now wondering how can a gift of God also be such a cruel mistress, well she is in good company. What about millions of years of carbon deposits which give us coal and oil and gas, which because of the way we have exploited them are now coming back to bite us as greenhouse gas emissions? What about money, which can achieve so much good but can also fuel greed or division?

It is not the things, the gifts, themselves which cause the problem, but rather our attitudes toward them.

For instance, how many of us read or hear the Gospel stories and know what is coming next? We know, if the woman who has been haemorrhaging for twelve years just touches the corner of Jesus' cloak she will be healed. We know, if the disciples wake Jesus he will still the wind and the waves that were threatening to sink the boat. We know that at Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem he will end up being crucified like a common criminal. Our wonderful, amazing brains, every time we hear the name Jesus, automatically and probably subconsciously add "Christ", because that is who we know him to be. Such is the gift of hindsight at its best.

And from that perspective, the Bible is perhaps the ultimate, the most beautiful gift of hindsight, preserving as it does, across the centuries, the eyewitness accounts of humanity's relationship with God.

And perhaps the most profound moment in that eyewitness account, preserved for us, is to be found in today's Gospel reading:

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

("Messiah" – mashiach in Hebrew, meaning Anointed One, for which the Greek word is "Christos" – Christ.)

Profound? Because this records Simon Peter as the first person to recognise God in the person of Jesus. God, walking and talking with his people, in a way which had not happened since Adam and Eve had been expelled from the Garden of Eden.

The kingdom of God had indeed come near.

Peter had no hindsight to fall back on; he was there, on the spot. Jesus was doing all the things which other prophets and priests of the time were doing – healing and preaching and teaching. Yet something in him recognised Jesus as the messiah for whom they had been waiting. And Jesus himself identified that “something” in Peter as the work of the Father.

Simon Peter, the Peter after whom our church here in Cradley is named, was the person whom God chose to reveal his identity to before anyone else. Should we not then be emboldened to speak the love of God to those we meet? We can sometimes condemn Peter for being somewhat impetuous, and with good cause. However the opposite, reticence, can be a greater sin because if Peter had not spoken what had been placed in his heart, he would have been resisting God’s work in him.

So let us take this opportunity to practice. Complete out loud the following sentence:

God is.....

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but we do need to treat her with more than a little respect.