

Sunday 27th August 2017

Matthew 16: 13-20, Romans 12:1-8, Isaiah 51:1-6

There was once a well known celebrity at the airport, when he got to the front of the queue to book his luggage etc. there was a slight difference of opinion about something and the celebrity said quite forcibly "Do you know who I am?" There was a moment of silence and then the assistant in rather a loud voice said "Does anybody know who this is.....he doesn't know who he is?"

Well I'm sure it was highly amusing for the assistant and those who were nearby and I expect the phrase is an oft used one by famous or nearly famous people. Our culture seeks out would be celebrities whether on all these reality type programmes or on twitter, you tube and Facebook.

The TV programme Who do you think you are is very popular and is about well known faces looking back at their family history, we all, it seems want to know where we come from and where everyone else comes from and it does make for good TV.

In our Gospel reading this morning we have Jesus asking the disciples that same question but lets have a closer look.

Jesus and his disciples had come to the district of Caesarea Philippi this comes immediately after the Pharisees and Sadducees had been testing Jesus asking him to show a sign from heaven - Caesarea Philippi was some 25 miles north east of the Sea of Galilee, near Mount Hermon.

The area was scattered with temples of the ancient Syrian Baal worship but there was something more: in Caesarea Philippi there was a great temple of white marble which was dedicated to Caesar.

It had been built by Herod the Great and later Herod's son Philip still further added and enriched the temple. Phillip changed the name from Panias to Caesarea - Caesar's town and added his own name Philippi which means *of Philip* to distinguish it from Caesarea on the coasts of the Mediterranean.

So they had come to Caesarea Philippi, Caesar had the title son of god, Caesar rules with a rod of iron so the Kingdom of God contrasting with the kingdom of Caesar.

The end was very near, Jesus needed time with his disciples he had so much to teach them, so he withdrew to this place, a place where the population was mainly non-Jewish, a place where there had been much worship of Baal and now where there was this great temple to Caesar.

Jesus needed to know if there was anyone who understood him, who recognised him for who and what he was. Would there be any who would carry on his work, would labour for his Kingdom, not a kingdom of Caesar.

Jesus must know before He sets out for Jerusalem, for the cross if any of them had grasped who He was, He didn't ask straight out, he led up to it by asking first "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" - in Hebrew or Aramaic son of man

simple means 'mortal' or human being.

And they respond with John the Baptist, Elijah and Jeremiah, well some thought that John the Baptist was so great a figure that he might come back from the dead, Elijah was the greatest prophet. Elijah and Jeremiah were forerunners of the Anointed One of God.

So when Jesus hears that, he asks the all important question 'But who do you say that I am?' You can imagine can't you the silence while the disciples try to get their head around that one.....but Peter doesn't let us down.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Peter was saying 'you are the true king, you're the one Israel has been waiting for. You are God's Son, the one that the psalms and prophets spoke about and Jesus knew there was someone who knew, who understood, that his work was safe.

This question is not only for the disciples it is for each one of us.....Jesus is asking each one of us, 'who do you say that I am?' We can know all sorts of things about Jesus and his teaching, and that is good and necessary as disciples we must always be learning, but it is not 'knowing **about** Jesus' it is in 'knowing Jesus'.

Not in 'knowing **about** Jesus' but in 'knowing Jesus' being in relationship with ...him.

And of course that leads us on to 'Who are we' as individuals and as church

Paul in his letter to the Romans talks about being transformed by the renewing of our minds, about discerning what is the will of God and that is very much what we have been doing and what we continue to do in the work here in church and in The Pallant Centre.

We are an all member ministry, as Paul says we are many but one body with many different gifts, called to use them in so many ways, in showing hospitality, in welcoming, stewarding and being sidespeople, in cleaning, flower arranging, serving at the altar, leading our music, leading our prayers, wielding a paint brush, in fundraising, in our church shop and the list goes on and on but the point is we are working together as one, serving - no one thing is more important than the other it is in all of us playing our part of the body here in the place.

Who we are as individuals and as church seen by our community, I wonder what they think of us as church and of course with our town fair coming up another way of us engaging with and serving our community.

Recognising gifts in others, encouraging others, building one another up.

And Peter is told, 'on this rock I will build my church.....' that is the first time that we hear both on the rock and about building his church.

There is a bit of a play on words here, in Greek Peter is Petros and a rock is Petra. Peter's Aramaic name was Kephias and that is also the Aramaic for a rock.

In either language there is a play on words.

You are Petros and on this petra I will build my Church. What ever it meant it is a word of great praise.

We have Peter who himself is sometimes a stumbling block to Jesus, the rocky soil that withers at times of persecution, would we choose this rock in which to build the church -
Jesus does

When Jesus asks, 'who do you say that I am?' what will be your reply, and what about 'who you are', not a stumbling black, but recognising gifts in others, encouraging others to build up the body of Christ here in this place.
Amen.