

**DATE: Sunday September 12, 2021**

**CHURCH: St Matthew's Kensington.**

**SERMON SERIES. Lectionary Gospel Readings**

**BIBLE PASSAGE: Mark 8:27-38**

**GENERAL THEME/TOPIC: "Who do you say that I am?"**

The story of an airline passenger whose flight had been cancelled, and who went to the check-in counter in high dudgeon, and demanded to have a seat on the next available flight to his destination. When he was told that there were no seats on the next flight, he still demanded a seat, and said to the attendant, "I must have a seat. Do you know who I am?" The attendant had no idea of the identification, and the irate passenger again said very loudly, "Do you know who I am?" The attendant reached for the microphone and announced, "Assistance is required a check-in Counter #5. There is a man here with amnesia, and who does not know who he is."

In our gospel reading this morning, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" Jesus had fed the 5,000, had taken on the Scribes and Pharisees about ritual hand-washing, had healed the daughter of the woman from Tyre. In the light of everything he had said and done, he now asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" Their reply was, "Some say this, and some say that ... some say that you are John. The Baptist revisiting us, some say that you are Elijah revisiting us, others say that you are one of the prophets."

Then Jesus really applied the acid to them. "But who do YOU say that I am?"

Right through Jesus' life, different people had been giving their opinion of who he was to them. **The Wise Men** back when Jesus had been born, said to Herod the king, "Where is he who has been born **king of the Jews?**" (Matthew 2:2). **The demented Gerasene demoniac**, mentally and emotionally disarranged, had said, "What have you to do with me, **Jesus, Son of the Most High God?**" (Mark 5:7). There was **the man born blind** whom Jesus healed, and when the Pharisees asked him for his opinion about Jesus, he said, "**He is a prophet.**" (John 9:17). The **people of Samaria**, having heard what the woman at the well said about Christ gave as their opinion, "**... we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.**" (John 4:42). And at the foot of the cross was the **centurion who supervised the execution of Jesus**, and that Roman soldier said, "Truly, **this man was the Son of God!**" (Mark 15:39). There was **the disciple Thomas** after the resurrection, who said to Christ, "**My Lord and my God.**"

All these people spoke - after reflecting on their experience-over-time with Christ, - or simply blurted out after an instantaneous-encounter with Christ, - what they thought about him. Some had walked and talked with Jesus for years. The Wise Men, for example, had studied the signs of the times; the disciples had observed and heard all that Jesus had done; the centurion was struck by the ongoing demeanour and grace of this man to be crucified, even after the torture and abuse that Jesus the prisoner had received.

And so Jesus asked his question to the disciples – those are the ideas that people have about me – but what about **you**? Who do **you** say that I am? Guess who spoke, and spoke immediately. Yes – Peter. Impulsive, excitable, spur-of-the-moment, 'did-I-really-say-that?' Peter. But what he said on this occasion was profound, was insightful and was true. "You are the Christ." Or to put it another way, "You are the Messiah." Or to put it in an expanded way, "You are the anointed agent of God's purposes in the world. You are the great, divine,

super-human figure, promised by God through the prophets, bringing in the perfect reign of God.” Peter was so right – but his expectations of the Christ, The Messiah were so wrong. Jews thought of the Messiah in terms of military might, overcoming Israel’s enemies, restoring the huge geographical and economic kingdom that David and Solomon had established, with the temple in Jerusalem as the central feature of the world’s attention.

Jesus was quick to correct Peter and the other disciples’ wrong expectations, to burst their Messianic balloon. “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must **suffer** many things, be **rejected** ... be **killed** ... and after three days rise again.” And he said this plainly. No parable for them to interpret. No Old Testament allusions to apply. He said this plainly. (Mark 8:31). Jesus’ messiahship was to be not of privilege, but of service; not of power *over* the weak, but of assistance *to* the weak; not of physical prowess, but of spiritual grace. Jesus had invited the disciples to “follow him” – and now he explains that they, like him, must take up *their* cross as part of that following, of denying themselves their own desire for importance and position in the world, of even losing their life for his sake. And among the 12 disciples who heard these words, most would lose their lives for Jesus’ sake, and be martyrs because of their devotion to Christ – Peter martyred in Rome; James martyred in Jerusalem; Matthew martyred in Ethiopia perhaps; Andrew martyred in Greece; Thomas martyred in India, Bartholomew martyred in Armenia; Philip martyred in Turkey; James the son of Alphaeus martyred in Syria; Simon Zealotes martyred in Persia.

And Jesus’ question comes down to you and to me also. “Who do **YOU** say that I am?” Our answer to that will depend on where we are in our Christian walk with the Lord, and what the circumstances of our life have been. In a moment of quietness, however, let us reflect on the answer we would give to that question. ... ..

At base, our answer will probably have such a thought as we say that Jesus Christ is my personal Lord and Saviour, however that may have happened – in a moment of blinding conversion as with St Paul, or in a life of quiet growth and understanding without an identifiable day and time of submission to the person of Jesus. “You are my personal Lord and Saviour,” we may answer in imitation of Peter’s answer.

“Who do **YOU** say that I am?” “You are my companion and friend,” we may answer.

“Who do **YOU** say that I am?” “You are the life and the light and the hope and the joy of my existence,” we may answer.

In times of trouble and even despair ... .. in times of sadness and of loneliness ... in times when we are challenged and put on the spot for our faith ... in times when we face turmoil and upset ... in times of unsurpassed joy and delight ... in times of inexplicable happiness and grace ... our answer to Jesus question, “Who do **YOU** say that I am” informs our faith, strengthens our souls and engraces our thoughts.

And if we should ever whisper in our prayers to God, “And who do you say that **I** am?”, God’s answer will always be the same – “You are my beloved child; you are the apple of my eye; you are the jewel in my crown.”

The Prayer of St Richard of Chichester is a most appropriate way to bring together all our thoughts this morning. Let us pray. “Thanks be to you, our Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which you have given us, for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us.

Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.”