

## Who do you say that I am?

12 September 2021

St Peter's Lockdown Service

Reading: Mark 8:27-38

*Loving God, open the Bible to us in a fresh and exciting way.*

*In Jesus' name.*

*Amen.*

Knowing who someone is, is very important. I saw a cartoon of a couple in lockdown. "It's so good Susan," says the husband to his wife, "to have this quality time to catch up." "The name is Helen," the wife responds.

The story is told of Sir Thomas Beecham, the great conductor. His brilliance as a conductor was only surpassed by his total inability to remember names and faces. Once when giving a concert he noticed a very well-dressed lady in the audience. She had lots of bling and a beautiful gown. So, he went up to her. He knew her but couldn't remember her name.

"How are you?" he asked.

"Oh, I am very well, but my brother has been rather ill lately," she said.

"Ah, yes, your brother. I'm sorry to hear that. And, er, what is your brother doing at the moment?"

"Well ... he's still King." replied Princess Mary.

Knowing who someone is can make all the difference.

Jesus has reached the northernmost point of his journeys, a place called Caesarea Philippi. It is a remote non-Jewish area in the foothills of the Mount Hermon range. He is having some alone time with the disciples and like all good teachers he starts with a question. He begins with an easy one. "Who do people say that I am?" The disciples have heard the rumours, "Some say you are John the baptizer, some Elijah, others say you are one of the prophets."

But then the question gets tricky. Jesus gets in their grill. "But who do you say that I am?" he asks them. This is personal. It's one thing to report what others think, it's another thing to share your own opinion. The disciples have all been sharing together this amazing experience of being with Jesus. Travelling with Jesus is to see firsthand people's lives transformed: lepers healed, bent over women straightened, dead children come alive, people with demons healed, rich people giving away money, thousands of people fed from a handful of fish. It's all been happening.

So, Peter steps up. He's often the first to say something, not always right, but this time he's on the money. "Jesus, you are the Messiah."

Today here and now we can imagine Jesus asking us that same question. Getting up and personal looking us in the eye and asking, "Who do you say that I am?"

There are lots of answers. Is he just a nice man or maybe a moral teacher, is he a super social worker or a healer? Or is he, as Paul writes, "The one in whom all the fullness of God dwells"? But how can Jesus be God? We find this pretty tricky.

Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, came to Avonhead. I tried to talk to him, but he seemed busy having his cup of tea. I guess to be Archbishop of Canterbury you must enjoy a good cup of tea. Anyway, he tells us who Jesus is by using the metaphor of a music performer.

Imagine going to hear someone really good play the piano - someone like Michael Houston play Beethoven for example. As you watch him his total concentration is on bringing you the notes from the master. While he plays his whole being is directed to one purpose and one purpose alone, bringing you the music. As you watch it's as if the line between the piano and Michael becomes blurred. It's as if the music, Michael, and the piano are one. So it is with Jesus, the good Archbishop concludes. His life was one with the love of God. He was so totally focused on being the love of God in the world, so much so that there was no longer any distinction between God and Jesus. You see one, you know the other.

In a moment Bob is going to play the cello, I hope you enjoy the music of course, but watch and see if he becomes one with the music. No pressure Bob!

“This is all very cool Nick, I hear you say but what of us, what difference does this make to me?” Well, something very important is happening here. The more we name Jesus for who he really is, the more we put him in the centre of our lives and the more we begin to discover who we are. The more we claim Jesus as Messiah and Saviour, the more we find meaning, purpose and joy in our own lives. Our identity is found in Jesus’ identity. To name Jesus for who he is, is to name ourselves as the beloved of God, the children of God, and this gives us the solid foundation we need to build our lives on.

You may remember the story of Helen of Troy. According to legend this beautiful queen was captured and carried away and became a victim of amnesia. She became a prostitute and, not remembering her name or her royal blood, she wandered from street to street.

Back in her homeland an old friend never gave up hope that she was still alive and determined to find her. He went to this new land and searched high and low. One day he saw a tattered woman, with deep lines across her face. There was something about her that seemed familiar, so he went up to her, “What is your name?” he asked. Her answer made no sense, so he asked to see her hands. She held them out. Then the old friend knew this was Helen. “You are Helen,” he said. She looked up astonished. The fog began to clear. “I am Helen,” she said. She had discovered her lost self. She put her arms around her friend, and he carried her home where she became the queen she was born to be.

We too are wandering in land that is not our own. We so easily forget who we are until one day an old friend comes. He shows us his hands. They are pierced hands. It is then he utters our name, a name we have long forgotten. “You are a child of God.” Then we remember “I am a child of God, created in the image and likeness of God. I am of the royal priesthood. I have been chosen and named and called.” And the wounded one carries you home rejoicing.