

## Reflection for 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2020

on Matthew 16: 13–20

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When Beethoven wrote his third symphony the Eroica it was to honour Napoleon Bonaparte the man he believed was a person of integrity who would solve the ills of Europe and govern in fairness justice and humility. When 'Bony' crowned himself Emperor, Beethoven was appalled and scrubbed Napoleon's name off his score with such anger he left a hole in the paper! He felt betrayed. The man he thought he knew and respected proved to be untrustworthy and power grabbing.

In today's reading Jesus asks his disciples a crucial question "Who do you say that I am?"

He asks this in a dangerous place – a town ruled by a puppet king under the oppression of the Romans. The conversation they were having was treasonous so no wonder at the end of it Jesus asked them to keep quiet about it.

First, he asks "who do other people say I am"

The replies he gets indicate a group of very outspoken and revolutionary people from their history – Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist. prophets who foretold and worked for the coming of a Saviour who would rescue Gods people from the oppression of their conquerors.

Then, Jesus asks them "but who do you say I am?"

Beethoven thought he knew who Napoleon was. In our time how well do we really know our leaders. Do we believe that those we elect into power will really serve the common good with justice and fairness? Or are we and people around the world being misled or manipulated into electing people whose concern is only for their own interests?

In many places, it seems that opposition is being curtailed. Human rights ignored or worse. Democracy made a laughing stock. As I look back at history, I often wondered how certain evil men came into power. Is history repeating itself?

Today Jesus asks us the same question:

Who do you say that I am?

We must consider this. Our lives depend on the answer we give. It's tempting perhaps to look at the powerful in the world and the impunity with which they use their so-called authority. Perhaps it would be wise and safe to acknowledge them and give them our allegiance? Then, we look to Jesus! *Who is this person?!*

Simon son of John (or 'Simon Johnson' as one version has him named), having lived alongside this man and heard his teaching and seen his acts of love and healing finally blurts out:

"You are the Christ; the Son of the living God!"

In this dangerous place, Peter recognises the true source of power and authority: Jesus, the Christ.

This is mind-blowing! Jesus says that God himself has revealed this to Simon who he renames Peter, (Petra, Cephas) – the Rock. The foundation of the church is built on such a declaration of faith.

This is actually the turning point in the Gospel when Jesus started on his journey towards the inevitable end of the cross. Reluctantly his disciples went with him not fully understanding. We like them are asked to journey with him and put our trust in him even if we don't fully understand. Faith is a journey. As we travel with Jesus, we learn more and more about him. We gradually realise that nothing can separate us from His love

I read the other day that most people today come to faith on the road to Emmaus rather than the road to Damascus. I think this was Peter's experience. Not a sudden conversion but a gradual dawning that this man he was following and listening to was indeed the promised Messiah although not as expected. He was not a warrior come to take power from the Romans but the Lord of another Kingdom.

So who do you think Jesus is?

Many today say he was a good man, a wonderful teacher and an example to live by. But that's all.

Is that how you see him?

Some others today see him as a misguided fool who wasted the opportunity to fulfil the role of Messiah as the Jews hoped he would. And as for allowing himself to be executed when he obviously could have escaped that fate – well, what a tragedy!

Is that how you see him?

Or can we recognise Him as the Messiah, the Christ, the Lord?

Can we say as St Paul says in Colossians Chapter 1:

*Jesus is the image of the invisible God – the firstborn of all creation. For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created – things visible and invisible, whether Thrones or dominions or rulers or powers -all things have been created through him and for him .He himself is before all things and in him all things are held together.*

This is a person we can trust. This is a person who will remain faithful to us and constant in his love. He can have all the power and authority he likes – he has it by right – not as our politicians and leaders have it – by democratic mandate or corruption.

So what do we answer when he asks us: "Who do you think I am?"

Can we respond in faith?

"You are the Christ, the Son of God."

Or say as Simon Peter did in another place:

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Is this someone we can respect, love, trust and serve? Someone who has our best interests and the good of the whole world, at heart?

### **A Prayer**

*Lord Jesus,*

*Help us to follow you as we learn to trust you:*

*You are the Way.*

*Help us to follow you as our faith grows through the experience of your love:*

*You are the Truth.*

*Help us as we learn we cannot live without you.*

*To whom may we turn as you have the words of eternal life:*

*You are the Life*

*Accept our first baby steps of faith, and our growing confidence in your trustworthiness.*

*We worship you because trust, belief and the desire to live your life bring us to your feet in adoration and praise and we say: “My Lord and my God”*

*Amen.*