

## **SERMON: 16 September 2018 – Rev Brenda Robson**

**“Who do you say I am?”**

**(Mark 8:27-38)**

The lectionary is taking us through the book of Mark. In chapter 8 Jesus has fed the 4000 with a little bread and a few fish and he has healed the blind man at Bethsaida by putting his saliva on the man's eyes. Two powerful miracles.

The conversation in today's reading then takes place as Jesus is on a two day walk from Bethsaida to the villages around Caesarea Philippi, about 30 miles.

Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do people say I am?"

The thousands who ate bread and fish or those who saw sight restored to the blind man; Who do they say I am?"

They replied "Some say John the Baptist." Now John has already been beheaded at this point so some people either didn't know that and think this is John, still alive or they did know he was killed and so he is risen and alive again.

Perhaps more interestingly, some say Elijah who has been long gone.

But the Jews were waiting for Elijah to return. The second last verse of Malachi, the second last verse of the Old Testament, the Lord says "I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes." And so for the Jews the return of Elijah would signal the end of days.

Just six days after Jesus had this discussion with the disciples walking along the road, the transfiguration took place where three disciples saw Jesus on a high mountain with Elijah and Moses.

So it is interesting that some people thought Jesus was Elijah

Jesus then asked the disciples, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter says "You are the Christ."

Simon in Aramaic is Shimon or Simeon, meaning "He who hears." Simon Peter heard the question and he answered. But not because he had worked it out for himself or had insights that the other disciples didn't have - but because he heard the revelation from God the Father that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son. He who hears, heard from God!

In our bible this section is headed "Peter's confession of Christ" which tells us nothing about the reason for his understanding.

In the Passion bible, the heading is "Peter Receives Revelation from God" and that is more satisfactory.

Matthew 16:17 describes this same conversation with Jesus and Matthew reports Jesus saying "Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah for this was not revealed to you by man but by my Father in heaven."

Matthew said that Jesus then went on to rename Simon, Peter the rock on whom the church will be built.

Peter was the first disciple who truly heard the Father's revelation of the identity of Jesus Christ.

I wonder, is that how we all become Christians? By supernatural revelation?

Some non-believers read the bible, analyse it, they reason and argue and debate, it is an intellectual pursuit. But in the end, a step of faith is needed and I think God through his Holy Spirit, takes that step towards us so that we can step into him.

That was CS Lewis' story, a man of powerful intellect and advanced education who researched and analysed, a sceptic and a doubter, until one day God revealed himself to Lewis in a way that he could no longer resist and he became one of the most influential Christians of his generation.

Like the disciple Thomas, who was not with the other disciples when the risen Jesus appeared to them in a locked room on that first Easter Sunday. Thomas said "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

Put yourself in Thomas' place. For eight days he suffered uncertainty and would not believe.

John 20 : 26. Then eight days later, Thomas and all the others were in the house together. And even though all the doors were locked, Jesus suddenly stood before them! "Peace to you," he said.

Then looking into Thomas' eyes, he said "Put your finger here in the wounds of my hands. Here - put your hand into my wounded side and see for yourself. Thomas, don't give in to your doubts any longer, just believe!"

Then the words spilled out of Thomas' heart - "You are my Lord and you are my God!"

Jesus responded "Thomas, now that you've seen me, you believe. But there are those who have never seen me with their eyes but have believed in me with their hearts, and they will be blessed even more."

What absolute joy for Thomas that day, to go from doubt and separation and loss to faith and blessing. Life changed through an encounter with the risen Jesus.

Maybe you remember the days before you were a Christian and how all things changed the hour you first believed.

That phrase came from somewhere - Amazing grace!" -

*I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.  
Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fear relieved.  
How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed!*

Jesus said in John 15:16. "You did not choose me but I chose you....."

Jesus chose you, isn't that amazing!

Our prayer for our loved ones who don't know Jesus should not be that they decide to follow Jesus but that Jesus will reveal himself to them, call them, choose them.

And he can choose you even if you don't know him, even if you're not searching!

I've shared before about a young man in Aberdeen a few years ago, in his late teens, who had had a difficult life, knew absolutely nothing about Jesus. One day he was walking alone in Aberdeen when he said he met Jesus. Jesus came to him and revealed himself and told the young man to go and read a bible. And he did and he was so excited because he found himself reading about the man he had met.

He told his friends and they came round to his flat and they studied the bible together and began to pray. A local lady heard about them and said to them they must come to the church - which they did - once. He continued his "house church" and eventually he was employed by the Church of Scotland. He was given a

flat in Lothian Road in Edinburgh, which became another house church as he drew in young people from around the city centre and shared the gospel message with them and prayed with them.

Jesus said you did not choose me but I chose you, to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Choosing Jesus is not an end point but the start of a new journey. And we will not always get it right. Peter got it spectacularly wrong immediately after his revelation about Jesus being God's son.

Jesus opens his heart to the disciples. He tells them he must suffer many things. He is referring to beatings, mocking, rejection, an illegal trial. He must be killed and after three days rise again.

A suffering Messiah and a dead Messiah were completely contrary to what the Jews expected of their Messiah.

Their Messiah would be king of Israel like Solomon or David, surrounded by glory and power and riches. Jesus had a different kind of glory in mind.

The disciples were genuinely confused and alarmed by Jesus saying this.

Mark records two further conversations Jesus had with his disciples about his suffering and death and still they remained confused.

Mark 9 : 30-32 - He said to them "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him and after three days he will rise." But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

Similarly at Mark 10 : 32 - 45 - the disciples remain confused and Jesus says "You don't have a clue!" (In Passion translation).

Back to our reading in Mark 8 - Jesus reveals the path he is to follow.....and Peter rebukes him! We are not told what Peter says but it must have been along the lines of "No! You will be a great king and defeat the Romans and free your people from oppression and then everyone will bow down to you and worship you. You will bring glory to Israel!"

Peter wanted Jesus to come up with another plan. But Peter had got it wrong, Jesus had come not to glorify Israel but to glorify God. And in doing so he would not only save Israel (or those Jews who believed in him) but he would save the whole world!

One minute Peter is speaking profoundly about who Jesus is with revelation and power, the next minute he is telling the Messiah off for choosing the wrong path.

And not just Peter, all the disciples thought the same as Peter. It says at verse 33 that Jesus looked at all his disciples before he rebuked Peter because he knew what they were all thinking.

The disciples saw that their lives would be bound up with the path Jesus chose. If he becomes the all-conquering king riding a white charger into Jerusalem to establish a royal court, then they've got it made! They didn't yet know about the donkey! They would be members of the royal household, advisers to the king, have freedom, luxury, power and influence.

But where would they all end up if Jesus goes down the wrong path, totally upsets the Jewish hierarchy and ends up dead!

Jesus rebukes Peter and the others. Then he calls the crowd to him and says to them as well as the disciples, and to us today, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Jesus chose the right path, the only path that would give us forgiveness for sins, peace and hope in our hearts, relationship with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit now and for all eternity.

May God bless you if you are walking that path today and enable you to carry your cross and help others to carry theirs.

If you have not yet confessed Jesus as your Lord and your Saviour, may you know in your heart today that God is calling you and inviting you to step onto that path.

I had a vision of Jesus last month, he was walking along a path ahead of me, he turned and smiled and held out his hand and invited me to continue walking along the path with him.

He is turning towards you today with a smile and an outstretched hand.

Amen