

“Who do you say I am?”

SPRINGLINE PARISH - SUNDAY TRINITY 15 B 2018 –
SERMON NOTES

THE GOSPEL OF TODAY: MARK 8:27-38 (NIVUK)

Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah

²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, ‘*Who do people say I am?*’

²⁸ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’ ²⁹ ‘*But what about you?*’ he asked. ‘*Who do you say I am?*’ Peter answered, ‘*You are the Messiah.*’ ³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus predicts his death

³¹ He then began to teach them that *the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.* ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ he said. ‘You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’

The way of the cross

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*’ ³⁵ *For whoever wants to save their life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.* ³⁶ *What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?* ³⁷ *Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?* ³⁸ *If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.*’ (italics+underlinings mine)

Introduction

The reading from James and the incredible, radical message about the tongue and how our speech can build up or destroy, give life or take it away.

What is the Lord telling us today as individuals and as a Church?
Let us briefly look at the gospel, “good news”, “*evangelion*”(Greek), for today. As you see the subtitles, there are three themes that come across the gospel of today:

- *Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah,*
- *Jesus predicts his death and*
- *the way of the cross.*

Let us see these three themes one by one.

1. Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah

Who do you say I am?

Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah/Christ is pivotal in the gospel of Mark. It is a declaration of faith that fulfils the Old Testament prophecies and affirms Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

The point is how does the passion and death of Jesus fit in with his identity as the Jewish Messiah. And above all, how do you answer this question of Jesus today?

Verse 27: “Who do people say that I am?”

This general question prepares for his more concrete query to the disciples in 8.29: “*Who do you say that I am?*”

People may say different things about Jesus even today. That is not important. *The crucial thing is who is Jesus to you? How would you answer Jesus if he were to ask you: “Who do you say that I am?”*

Verse 8.29: “You are the Christ”.

Peter acknowledges Jesus to be the Messiah. Hebrew ‘*masiah*’ is translated as Greek ‘*Christos*’; both words mean ‘*anointed*’. Though various figures in ancient Israel were anointed, the term came to be applied most distinctively to kings. The term also was used to describe Israel’s future leader in the period before the ‘*eschaton*’ (in Greek means ‘end times’) and during it; *he would fulfil Israel’s hopes based on God’s promises.*

2. Jesus predicts his passion and death

The gospel of Mark explains what it means to call Jesus the Christ and what its implications are for disciples.

In verses 8.31-33, Jesus clarifies the nature of his identity as the Messiah/Christ by means of the first passion prediction – that of his suffering, death and resurrection. In verse 33 Jesus rebukes Peter 8.33: Anyone who denies the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus stands on the side of Satan (Mt 4.10). By calling Peter “Satan” Jesus indicates that *the false view of his messiahship is a temptation*.

3. The way of the cross - Consequences for Discipleship (Mark 8.34-38).

The theme of suffering is dominant:

- The need for self-denial (verse 8.34): following Jesus involves a decision for him ‘costing not less than everything’ (D.Bonhoeffer). But Jesus himself is the model. He carried the cross. Crucifixion was well known to Jews as the ultimate Roman punishment. The condemned man carried the upper part of the cross (the crossbeam; see Mark 15.21). The image (see Mat 10.38, 16.24, Luke 9.23, 14.27) may express submission to divine authority on the analogy of the condemned criminal’s submission to Roman authority.
- Losing one’s life for the gospel (verse 8.35): ‘gospel’ here refers not to a book or a literary genre but to the good news about Jesus or Jesus himself.
- The value of the true self (8. 36-37). “Life” (Greek ‘psyche’ and Hebrew ‘nephesh’) is used in the sense of ‘the true self.’ In following Jesus, the disciples can find their true selves, and nothing is more important.
- Not being ashamed of the Son of Man (verse 8.38)

Conclusion

How does the Word of God affect us and challenge us today?

It all comes down finally to one thing and that is confronting Jesus who asks you: “Who do you say I am?”

In following Jesus, the disciples can find their true selves, and nothing is more important – and not being ashamed of the Son of Man (8.38)

Some time ago the Parliament defeated the ‘Assisted Dying Bill’ overwhelmingly. As Christians we can only thank God that the Parliament has stood on the side of life which is a gift of God.

But questions are increasingly being raised why this Christian country is ashamed or afraid of standing up to its Christian heritage and soul? Why are we as a nation failing to be fascinated with Jesus Christ and his ‘good news’?

A Church can change ‘only’ when it meets God and learns to live in His presence. Nothing else can make it different in the real sense. When the members of a Church encounter God and His presence, change will happen, change that is true and genuine, long lasting and total. We at Springline Parish must help people to encounter God and live in His presence, to help people be transformed and transfigured by Christ. That is real change that changes the world from the inside.

On a personal level, it all comes down finally to one thing and that is confronting Jesus who asks you: “Who do you say I am?”

Only in following Jesus, the disciples can find their true selves, and nothing is more important – and not being ashamed of the Son of Man (verse 8.38) That is why Jesus is asking you today: *“Who do you say I am?”*

[ST Mattapally]