

Sermon – Matthew 16:13-20 – Trinity 11 – 23 August 2020

Just before Peter confesses his faith in Jesus the Christ – the Messiah - ‘the Son of the living God’ – Jesus is performing miracles despite the religious authorities ganging up on him – and Jesus has walked on the water and beckoned Peter to come to him – Peter responds to the call – gets frightened and falls and of course, is rescued by Jesus – and no sooner did Jesus gently reproach them with ‘Ye of little faith’ – he stills the water and Peter and the disciples declare ‘surely you are the son of God...

So now we have recognition of Jesus the Son of God – and the profession of faith in that fact... - A bold question from Jesus to Simon-Peter – and a bold response in reply.

From that comes a new identity for Simon-Peter – and a new name – Peter ‘the rock’

And upon this rock – Jesus vowed to build his Church and give Peter and the church the keys to the kingdom – what more can one ask for?

The disciples are also ordered to keep quiet – but this is short-lived – because of course, it was impossible to keep quiet about such a glorious fact – God among us – and impossible for those who couldn’t take it to do nothing else than to get rid of such a threat to their authority and power..

The scene is set in the city of Caesarea Philippi – a seat of Roman rule through the puppet-ruling of Philip – Herod the Great’s son – he had that city built and called it such to distinguish it from Caesarea Maritima where the Roman Governor lived – and it is to his regime that Jesus is asking political questions about his identity – could he be John the Baptist – executed by Philip’s brother if you remember – or great prophets Elijah or Jeremiah – both political troublemakers of their day.

And so you can imagine how dangerous it would have been to have Peter’s profession of faith proclaimed widely – because just like the profession of faith when Jesus was baptised – or at the transfiguration – this was God’s proclamation – this time through Peter – and in a time where there can only be one ‘Lord’ – which as far as Caesar was concerned, it was he – then having Jesus proclaimed as ‘Lord’ was denying the status for Caesar – and of course, that could only mean deeper political trouble ahead which would no doubt play out in more violence and oppression for the people.

Jesus was aware of all this and aware that it was happening in a Gentile place – a place of many conflicting religions and ideals – and amongst it all Jesus was asking the disciples to decide where their allegiance – and their faith – lay – to decide upon who Jesus is and to make that commitment to trust and follow.... And we know how the story unfolds from there, don’t we...

But of course – because of all that – the suffering and the dying – we have the resurrection-promise of new life and new beginnings – and we also have the full story – the glory of the risen Lord has been revealed and we are called to speak out – not keep quiet – to speak out in words for sure – and action most definitely.

This passage is the only time the word ‘Church’ is used to refer to a Christian Community as a whole –

Again, we hear the message loud and clear of a Gospel of Community – and even in the reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans he is indicating to them how Christians hold a vision of life in community – each offering their body – as a ‘single sacrifice’. Of course we aren’t under a dominating empire rule – but we are under the influence of an insidious pandemic right now, along with all the other darkness and frailties of humanity and natural hazards.

Paul shows us the gifts that the Holy Spirit can impart within us so that our outward actions of caring and sharing in a compassionate and loving and responsible way are not about status or

how much we know or how well we are educated, but how open we are to be a channel of God's love and how we can live that out following the example of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

So as part of the Wrecclesham Christian Community – we can give thanks to God – that we are a community of communities – all coming together to profess the goodness, love and mercy of God through Jesus Christ – and of course, especially at this moment, we can thank God for the way we are part of a community that does seek to live together and support each other – and others in whatever way we are able in these uncertain and confusing times.

When Peter declares: "You are the Messiah", he is saying what has to be said for us to be called Christian. To be Christian means believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Anything else -- anything less -- might be religious, but it is not Christian.

... Let us always pray to God to be shown what we can bring to each day in the Christian spirit of love and service – just as we are. Peter's greatness was recognised by Jesus from the moment he was chosen as a fisherman – he didn't have to 'get good' to go to God - Peter is among the greatest of the saints precisely because of his earthy humanity, his shortcomings, his doubt and, moreover, his deeply felt understanding of all these things.

And actually, we can remind ourselves that very often, in times like these, the biggest gift we can bring to the world is our loving and faithful prayers lifted up to a loving and faithful God through our Lord Jesus as he intercedes for us and prays through us in the name of justice, truth and love...Amen.

Rev Jacqueline Drake-Smith