

All Saints Talk for 03 March 2024

Phil Day

God's Questions: Who do you say that I am?

3 points – Be thankful for the revelation you have already had; Go on seeking Jesus; consider who you would say Jesus is to others

"Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say I am?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'God's Messiah.' Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.' Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. 'Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.'"

Luke 9:18-27 NIVUK

- Today's question "who do you say I am?" We're in Lent and we're Ramping up towards the events we remember at Easter. –
- Today we are going to look at how this question fits into the story of Jesus and his disciples' life and then applying it to ourselves.
- Of these titles for Jesus on screen – which resonate most with you? Saviour, Healer, Judge, Friend, King, Son of God, Son of Man, Servant, Conqueror, Teacher, deliverer, prophet, God made man, Lord, Mary's Son, Brother, storyteller – do any of these titles resonate with you more or less than any others?
- Watch video clip of people on street answering question: Who was/is Jesus?
- So, I wonder how you would answer that question? Would you have a simple answer or would it be more complex?

- Let's start by looking at the passage, for some context?
 - Jesus is talking to his disciples right in the thick of his ministry.
 - After having shown many signs of his power and mission. Healing the sick, calming the storm, casting out demons. He's been gathering great crowds of people, coming to listen to him and get healing as well as witnessing his miracles.
 - Also, he is beginning to hit the headlines, the Pharisees are speaking against him (blasphemer, drunk). And even Herod has been asking questions about him and trying to get to meet him.
 - IN there middle of John's Gospel, it seems there is a constant back and forth and argument about who Jesus is between Jesus and the 'Jews' or chief priests and pharisees.
 - But in the other gospels we get this as a quiet moment of conversation: Luke says he was praying in private; Matthew 16 says when they came to Caesarea Philippi; Mark 8 says "on the way to C.P."
 - It feels quite intimate and personal like a moment for the disciples themselves.
 - Passage comes after he has sent out his disciples to do some of what he has done. – proclaiming good news and healing people – act of work experience – so they've had a taste of working in God's power and doing what he has been doing. They've also just fed 5000 people.
 - He asks them who do people say I am – They answer some say John the Baptist (who had just recently been executed), some say Elijah.
 - By this they were referring to a prophesy in Malachi that Elijah would come before the Messiah. And Jesus in Matt 11, himself hints that John the Baptist was performing this Elijah role.
 - They don't mention the negative stuff. That people have been saying.
 - Then Jesus asks the disciples, well what about you?

- I think this question is for them, for their teaching and learning. As a teacher myself, I know the power of questioning, encouraging people to talk through and work through what they think. It's a little challenge.
- The disciples have been up close and personal, they've seen his actions, his miracles, heard his words. Do they get it?
- And low and behold initially yes it seems they do – Peter speaks up – you are “God’s Messiah” In Matthew’s version he says: ” ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’” - Matthew 16:16
- Hooray! They get it! Or do they?
- Who is this messiah? What was their understanding? Who were they expecting?
- Messiah means “Anointed One” – The King but more than this – To be anointed was to be marked out as connection between God or the Heaven’s and People or the Earth. The Oil used in anointing is a symbol of life and God’s spirit. Jacob anointed a stone after his dream of a stairway to heaven. The priests anointed the Tent used as a meeting place for people and God. Kings and priests were anointed.
- They were expecting a new king. Another – better - King David.
- But what were they expecting this king to do, did they know? Take charge and restore the kingdom of Israel? Kick out roman occupiers? Bring peace and prosperity?
- They had had lots of prophecies to think on over the years:
- *”This is what the Lord says – the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel – to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: ‘Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.’” - Isaiah 49:7*
- “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord – and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or

decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash round his waist.” - Isaiah 11:1-5

- "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. “ - Isaiah 53:3-5 NIVUK
- They are still working him out – and I love that they don’t quite get it.
- Peter says “you are the Messiah” but then when Jesus begins to teach what this really looks like: that Jesus would be punished and killed before rising again,
- in Mark’s version of the story, ‘Peter takes him aside and rebukes him.’
- *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.’* - Mark 8:29-33 NIVUK
- Clearly they didn’t get it – at least not fully.
- I take hope from this – despite this pretty full on telling off of Peter and despite the disciples lack of understanding, Jesus was still keen to use them. They’d just been out around the towns – healing people and driving out demons.
- I take hope from this, because I believe despite my lack of understanding and perhaps sometimes my wrong understanding, Jesus is still willing to use me and use my experience and my understanding as it is.
- This is my FIRST POINT – give thanks for the revelation you have already been given. There may be many stories of Jesus alive in our lives. Jesus connecting with us, showing us who he is. Both in the bible and in our experience. His Holy Spirit impacting our lives. Answered prayers. His kingdoms values and life breaking through into the world.

- And I love that this is diverse. I think we have different stories because we take hope in and respond and resonate with different aspects of Jesus character at different times in our lives.
- You might respond to the healer, you might respond to the wise teacher, to the Jesus who looked for and met with those in society who others shunned. Who revealed an 'upside down kingdom' where the king raises up the weak lays down his life for his people.
- You might respond to the Jesus in the Temple, turning tables and railing against unjust human systems. You might respond to Jesus giving up his life, showing his true power over the human rulers was not in defeating them militarily.
- You might respond to him taking the whole history of human selfishness and sin upon himself. You might respond to the risen Jesus showing he had power over death itself.
- And hopefully you have responded to a Jesus who has invited you into a different life, an eternal life in his Kingdom of love and transformation.
- You might respond to all of this, but maybe at different moments of your life.
- Be thankful for this and ask and let Jesus inspire you to follow his example.
- But also, POINT 2 , **keep seeking him** – I think if we follow the example Peter, we see a disciple who lived alongside Jesus, still working him out even after many revelations and many stumbles.
- This encourages me to keep seeking – why did Jesus do this? Why did he say that? Have I got it right? Teach me more Lord.
- I think this is ok as long as we maintain a humility that maybe we don't have all the answers, but we have a God in Jesus who will use us despite this.
- I love the way, some of the people Jesus praised in the bible were not the ones we'd expect: the Syrian-phonician woman in Mark who argued her case for the deliverance of her daughter; the roman centurion in Mt 8 who recognises Jesus can heal his servant from a distance, they had limited knowledge of Jesus and yet he praised their faith

- When we face difficult decisions, pray and ask Jesus to keep revealing himself to us and the right course of action.
- Yes we might make mistakes but that's ok if we are truly seeking Jesus and trying to follow him.
- And also, be humble enough to be open to Jesus continuing to surprise and amaze you through the bible and through others.
- And my LAST point is this: have an answer to the question. WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?
- As I have said, I think this question was for the disciples, to help them think through who they thought Jesus was and to teach them more.
- But for you in your life and the connections and conversations you have with other people, do you know what your answer is?
- Is it a bible verse, is it a personal story, is it a 6 and a half minute description like that recorded by SM Lockridge – you might have heard it – “that's my king – do you know him?”
- Maybe it has changed slightly over time? Maybe it's the same story you would have told 20, 30, 40 years ago.
- I think we can take this question today as an invitation to consider who we would say Jesus is and be ready to share that story and act on who the answer prompts us to be as his disciples.