

## 24th Sunday Year B

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I can't remember if it was Mark's or Matthew's version of this gospel on my very first Sunday in the parish in North Shields so I thought I would ask the congregation "Who do you say I am" One teenager (we had a few on the congregation) said "You are the priest" (good answer), another (also teenaged lad) "You are Fr Nick" (Doing well) Boy at the back about 4 years old, hand straight up, "You are God!" Good answer but not quite, I said.

In Mark's version of this encounter there is no "Son of the living God" no "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church" exchange as in Matthew. Simply Simon says "You are the Christ of God" – the anointed one, the chosen one. Last week we heard Deacon Michael say that the healing of the deaf mute was leading up to this turning point – literally – a game changer. For this is the first of three predictions of the passion which accompany Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Only John's gospel has Jesus visiting Jerusalem a number of times over the 3 years for various festivals, as he would have done. Synoptics, Mt Mk & Lk see him go up once for his passion, death & resurrection – a journey with a purpose, to fulfil his Father's will and win our salvation. And each prediction is followed by a misunderstanding by the disciples.

Up till now Jesus has been a healer, exorcist, teacher, preacher (& eater.....) accompanying his ministry with signs which seem to show his power, perhaps as the good deeds St James says are necessary for us to do to show we are people of faith. At the same time after many of those healing acts he says "Don't tell anyone, ha'd yer wisht" After Mark begins his Gospel with the words "The Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God" we don't hear that phrase again, people asking after his miracles "Who can this be – even the winds and waves obey him?" until the centurion at the foot of the cross (John Wayne) as Jesus dies declares "This surely was the Son of God".

So Jesus asks what the people, the general public, are saying about him. What are the rumours? Their guesses as John the Baptist (haven't they read on the news app that he has been executed?) or Elijah are getting warm but fall short of the reality. "You are the Christ" but again Jesus warns them not to spread this until it can be fully understood in the context of his passion death and resurrection. Peter is

alarmed. Even as we read or watch fiction, we don't like the hero to die – Romeo & Juliet, Harry Potter (how many die there....? – discuss at home) Peter does not want Jesus to suffer, to die, Get behind me Satan – Peter's objection is a temptation to Jesus not to go through with it.

Who do YOU say I am. How do we come to know Jesus Christ, messiah, anointed, saviour, friend for ourselves? There are many interpretations, teachings, some way off the truth, some misleading, some helpful. Is the Jesus we have been told about by others, priests, nuns, teachers, the Jesus Christ of Matthew Mark Luke & John & Paul?

We get to know him by coming together as Church to hear his word speaking in our hearts, as we praise and worship him together, as we celebrate the sacraments, and as we meditate on that word for ourselves and make his Word our own, as we converse with him in the scriptures – sometimes helped by others, the writings of the saints, good preaching, but in the end Pope Benedict asked do we have a personal relationship with him?

That is why we celebrate today the important work of our readers, Lectors, those who do not just read but proclaim God's word to us. It is most helpful to us listening if you have meditated on that reading and welcomed that word into your own hearts so others' faith may be strengthened & challenged. Thank you. Thank you also to all who put that word into action as St James emphasises. How can we say we believe if we do not care for our poor, needy, lost abused in the world? Faith without works is dead, so all caring for refugees, for seafarers without enough clothes, Mary's meals now feeding 2 million children every day, our care for the unborn or the elderly: so many ways in which we share our faith and knowledge of Our Lord Jesus by the way we open up a little bit of God's kingdom to others, perhaps prompting them to ask who is this Jesus you care about so much?