

SERMON FOR SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

ST JUDE'S, BRIGHTON

15 SEPTEMBER 2024

Have you ever thought to appropriate a song that will describe who you are? Here are some suggestions.

If you are a golfer why not 'There is a green hill far away.'

If you are or were a farmer 'Come raise the song of harvest home!'

An optician, 'Be thou my vision.'

But if a writer, 'This is my story this is my song.'

Jesus asked a question of his disciples "*Who do people say that I am?*" Their answer suggests they were caught off guard. I can picture them scratching their heads. They've heard rumours from the crowds following Jesus as people have tried to work out, understand, who this miracle worker is. The uncertain answers they've heard may be similar to answers we get to religious questions from those who went to Sunday School once upon a time but no longer attend church. Maybe John the Baptist? Or maybe Elijah even? Maybe one of the prophets? 'Or, I just don't know!'

Jesus brings the question closer to the disciples and changes the question to 'Who do you say that I am?' It remains a confronting question. Perhaps more so now that the disciples are asked to answer it. No longer can the answer be ad hoc. It now demands thought, and directly exposes those to whom it is directed the challenge to get it right, get close to being right, or get it wrong. Much more difficult than when answering on behalf of others.

Peter, as we have heard, jumps in with an answer that seems to hit the nail on the head. "*You are the Messiah!*" We might say 'You are the anointed one!'

What we do say using the Greek translation of the Hebrew is 'You are the Christ!'

In St Mark's account Jesus moves past that question. He moves past the answer Peter gives that uses the descriptive title Messiah, the divinely anointed one executing God's mission on earth, to the apocalyptic and more heavenly title 'Son of Man'.

"Then he begins to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo suffering and be rejected by the elders and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said this quite openly" Mark 8.33

The question *"Who do people say that I am?"* progresses to the question put to the disciples *"Who do you say that I am?"* Resulting in Peter's answer you are the Messiah, the one who on earth executes God's mission amongst the men and women and children of his day. You are the King Israel looks for and has waited for. Here we get a hint of why the Roman and Jewish authorities were so concerned and why Jesus was crucified.

Jesus now takes his disciples beyond that understanding to the sharp end of his mission and exposes his true nature encapsulated in the fuller Messianic title 'Son of Man'.

The sharp end of Jesus' earthly ministry will take him to great suffering, rejection, the cross, and then to the great reward for all of us - resurrection! And if we come close to answering the question 'who do you say that I am?', the commitment to deny oneself and carry whatever cross is ours to bear as we follow Jesus along the way.

Whom do we worship today? We worship the divine God Man who is the King of Heaven and Earth. We acknowledge and worship Jesus, who is the perfect human spirit and the divine expression of God's will, lifting our humanity to be where he is.

There is another question that I think is linked to the one Jesus asked his disciples. It is born from that confronting question 'Who do you say that I am?'. It is, 'Who do I say that I am?'

Other people will undoubtedly answer that question for us. Some of their answers will be more accurate than other answers we hear. But what is important is how we see

ourselves. How will we answer that question linked to the one Jesus asks? Perhaps an answer can be found in the hymns and songs we sing.

So what song or hymn would we use to answer the Jesus question, 'Who do you say that I am?'

Maybe 'A man there lived in Galilee.'

It could be 'Hail Redeemer King divine!'

Most Probably 'By your kingly power O risen Lord.'

And what about us? What song best describes who we are?

Why not? 'O for a closer walk with God.'

Again why not. 'All my hope on God is founded?'

It could be 'Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord!'

Have a happy and interesting search for the right answers. But remember, as you and I enter more and more into Christ's life our selections may need updating.

Fr John