

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 12th September 2021
Trinity 15 YrB
Word of mouth

Whenever we need work doing or we want or need a service we want reliability at a good price. We want to know that a job will be done well. On the internet we can look for the Trustpilot rating of a company or a product. We can note ratings and read reviews. Groups and companies like TripAdvisor have reputations they defend aggressively as their kudos depends on trust and fairness. Some of you may be on your 'Next door' neighbourhood group. It is an application and a website that purports to connect people in a given area, allowing a sharing of information, asking of local questions and getting advice and guidance on local issues.

Through all these examples we are searching for clarity and reassurance. We want to know that we will receive a service we pay for or goods that are fit for purpose. We are searching for the 'word of mouth' assurance from a trusted source that will not lead to our being led up the garden path or being left with a duff item. To be able to say, "Well, it does what it says on the tin." is all we ask for.

What then of Jesus' question to the disciples in today's gospel reading, "who do people say that I am?" As with any tradesman, and don't forget Jesus was a carpenter, it is just as important to know what people are saying about you, how effective you have been, is your work up to scratch? "Who do people say that I am?", I doubt this is an attempt to boost ratings. What this little story does do is give us readers an opportunity to stop and review or evaluate what we have heard about Jesus so far.

Remember, Mark starts his Gospel by telling the reader who Jesus is – Mark 1.1 "This is the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God". This is what Mark has been telling us ever since. Now, half way through the story, Mark stops and asks a basic question, one which is also directed towards us. We have been reading the story of Jesus, now we have a chance to evaluate that question for ourselves. Indeed the question changes in the passage from "who do people say that I am?" to "who do YOU say that I am?". In other words dear reader,

what is your verdict at this point. You've had Mark telling you all about Jesus, the Christ. You've noted the ratings and reviews – from Pharisees, Tax collectors, demoniacs, followers – you've heard the teaching and reports of his power, so who do you say he is? A good man, a miracle worker, a charlatan?

In our story the disciples initially identify Jesus with the work of the prophets – John the Baptist, Elijah, maybe Isaiah or Daniel. The people have identified something special about this man – this man who taught with wisdom, fed thousands on next to nothing and walked on water – but they have not yet got the full significance of this man; until Peter speaks that is. We reach the point where those who know Jesus of Nazareth were able to tell us who he is – the Messiah, the Son of God. If we have travelled this far with Jesus we might be able to offer the same trusted information.

Contained in this story is the journey of faith. Who is this Jesus? Who do we think this Jesus is? This is the starting point of our faith journey. In that journey we can reject this Jesus – as we are told many disciples did (John 6) - we can accept him as the Messiah, the Son of God, as Peter did – though even at this point Peter still had a long way to go in understanding what that truly meant. How we travel on the journey of faith depends often on how we can trust the story. This is where the Holy Spirit comes in I guess, who witnesses today to the Christ as the Saviour of the world, who sets our hearts a flame when we hear the good news of Jesus.

This becomes the key for the Christian Mission. I guess if we are here today, whether in person or on Zoom we believe in Jesus and we are on that journey of faith. We may not have reached the place of Peter but we are making our way there. We are asking questions, thinking and praying about our faith, asking God to strengthen us and guide us as we try to make sense of all this. If we accept Jesus the Christ as our Saviour and allow him in the power of the Holy Spirit to change our lives; if we can say we are Christians trying to live up to our baptismal promises then we are journeying with the disciples.

Today, at this point in Mark's Gospel and at this point in the Christian year is about hearing Jesus' question for ourselves. It was asked of us through our parents and godparents at our baptism, we answered that question for

ourselves at our confirmation. But it is still a question with importance for us today; “who do you say I am?”. And the answer has consequences.

The Christian faith is not a passive faith. It is dynamic and costly. Answering the call of God upon your life has consequences. Peter is a great example of that. He had to give up his sedate life as a fishman and become an evangelist. Paul gave up being a tent maker to preach to the Gentiles. Today I believe, more than ever, Christians must share their faith stories, to realise their evangelist potential, however great or small, to bring the good news of Jesus to the ears of everyone whether they have heard the story before or not. For the most powerful missional tool we have today is word of mouth, is telling our story, developing our own Trust Pilot rating. So, who do you say Jesus is?

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