

St Peter's, Ealing

Sunday 23rd August 2020

Trinity 11 yr. A

Who do you think you are?

Romans 12.1-8; Matthew 16.13-20

I am sure many of you will have come across the tv programme, "Who do you think you are?". Celebrities are taken on a journey of their personal history, discovering interesting things about their ancestors and if they are lucky about themselves. There was the classic with Danny Dyre, an actor from EastEnders, who discovered he was related to two Kings of England. In some cases, the history has proved life changing (thankfully Danny was not able to claim the throne). In many others it was an interesting journey answering familial questions they had often pondered such as where did they come from.

Finding out something about who you are can be important. My family never knew where our name came from. My grandmother told stories of the Spanish Armada and Iberian Royalty being captured in Somerset following a ship wreck and having fallen in love with a country girl. Turns out our name predates the Armada by at least 50 years and comes from North Devon. From this we have learnt of our humble beginnings as land labourers and our exodus from the family village to Plymouth during land settlements and agricultural industrialisation of the mid nineteenth century. Context can give a lot of meaning and understanding to who we are and why we are where we are.

Understanding who we are is also about digging deeper into ourselves, exploring those darker corners of who we are and bringing to light a clearer understanding of ourselves. It is not easy and takes a lifetime. We are also often defined by how we are understood by others. In some circles I am not found of being introduced as a vicar. This can define how people approach or indeed do not approach me. It took the partner of one of my family members a long time to pluck up the courage to speak to me. She had been told I was a vicar and she had preconceived ideas of what that meant and how I would react and how I would expect her to behave. All because she had been told, "this is Uncle David, he's a vicar".

Paul sets us a challenge in today's reading from his letter to the Romans. He understands we are each different. We have different gifts, different personalities and as such have different parts to play in the mission and ministry of God. Paul wants us to be clear too that as Christians we are a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. He wants us to understand what it means to be a Christian, to call ourselves followers of Christ. This does require us to look deeply into ourselves, to be prepared for that holy sacrifice, which is to conform to the will of God and not the fashion of the day, the wiles of the world. We are born again through water and the spirit. That means we have a new start, a new way of living and of life that is called to be God centred.

Jesus wanted to know what was being said about him and through asking his question, "Who do people say I am?" he encouraged his disciples to witness to him and his place in their lives. Peter did not just blurt out his answer, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Peter had considered his answer. This came from deep within, from his experience and engagement with Jesus, from what he saw and what he felt. This is Jesus' question to all who claim to follow him. If we, like Peter, claim Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God then we are also saying something deep and important about who we are; no longer followers of fashion, of the way of the world, but of Jesus who calls us to proclaim the healing love of God in the world.

So today ponder that question for yourselves, "who do I say Jesus is?". See where your answer leads you.