

**St Peter's, Ealing**  
**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2017**  
**Trinity 11**

**Do not be conformed to the world**

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I am sure you have gathered by now I have several scriptural passages I really love. Today's is no exception. This story, set by Matthew in Caesarea Philippi occurs too in Mark (8.27-30). It may be that Matthew has borrowed this story from Mark but there are a number of differences. For example, for Mark the geographical location is of less importance to the story. Mark ties the passage closely to a healing miracle in the previous pericope (Vs 22-26), the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida. Each writer uses the story in different ways, yet because of the way the story is written and presented in its' basic form it is likely this theological discussion actually took place.

In Mark, the revelation of Jesus to his disciples through the words of Peter are linked to the previous healing story in that as the eyes of the blind man are opened so are the eyes of the disciples. Their eyes are opened to the spiritual reality of Jesus, his true nature as the anointed one, the Messiah, who Jesus truly is. This may seem strange bearing in mind how much of the story of Jesus has already been unveiled to them, how much they have already shared and experienced with Jesus and the miracles he has shared with them or performed in their presence. Yet Mark is making a point, as Mark tends to do. At this juncture, approximately half way through his telling of the good news, Mark hammers home what he has been trying to make sure the reader of his gospel has understood, that this is the gospel of Jesus Christ, The Son of God (1.1).

Matthew's approach is different. His rendition of the story is set apart. It stands alone and is clearly meant as a theological reflection on the nature of Jesus. The key to this discussion is the question, "Who do you say I am?". In Mark's gospel Peter tells the reader in his reply, "You are the Christ" at which point Jesus tells the disciples to keep this to themselves.

In Matthew's telling of this story Jesus unpacks the theological nature of this spiritual revelation, that it has come from God. That the church is to be built on Peter is really a statement that the Church that is to come as Jesus' body on earth will be built on the revelation of this spiritual truth, brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God". There is power and authority in this revelation.

This power and authority comes from the change this good news has brought about in Jesus' followers. They have begun this journey as fishermen and tax collectors, men and women of business and service, nothing grand in their demeanour yet now all changes. Here too in Matthew's gospel the story changes as Jesus reveals the true path of his ministry, that he is to go to Jerusalem, to die and rise again (16.22-end); this change in the direction of his ministry emphasised in the transfiguration told us in the next chapter (17.1-13). Now the

disciples are to take their share in the ministry, journeying to Jerusalem and beyond, building the church, the body of Christ to proclaim God's love in all the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In declaring to the world who Jesus truly is Peter heralds the change in our relationship with God. In engaging with Jesus, we should change. By saying who he is we change, or we should be changed if he means anything to us. when the gospel passage challenges us and asks us "who do you say I am?".

Now, be careful how you answer that question, your answer will have consequences. Paul, in today's passage from his letter to the Romans, appeals to us, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed". We are transformed when we accept Jesus as our Messiah, as our anointed. We begin that journey at our baptism. We continue it daily as we live our faith anew. As we confront that question, "who do you say I am?" afresh each day.

We can take our faith for granted. We may think there are occasions when it is not appropriate to reveal our faith. There are times when we negate our faith. Yet each time Jesus asks us "who do you say I am?" we must answer. What do you answer? How are you changed? How are you renewed in the power of God, in the power of the holy spirit? Are you renewed? Do you hear the words of Paul? "I appeal to you then, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship".

As the children of God, we gather in this place and around this altar to receive the grace of God in the blessed sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus Christ given to us in the bread and wine of the holy eucharist. As you come to the altar ask yourself, "who do I say Jesus is?" Be renewed and changed, be transformed in the power of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus afresh as your Messiah, your anointed, the Son of the living God.