

Year A Proper 21 23rd August 2026

Isaiah 51:1-6. Romans 12: 1-8. Matthew 16: 13-20

The lectionary readings this week are, each one of them, worthy of a sermon of their own. Don't worry, I am not going to deliver three sermons and I will try not to deliver three sermons forced into one, either.

Questions, questions, questions... If you had children, can you recall that age when many, many, conversations started with, "Why does...", or "How does..." or "What does..." as your child grappled with seeking to understand the way the world works as they become more aware of the world around them rather than their internal world. It can be tiring but also a delight to sense a young mind transitioning from their life revolving around themselves, to becoming more and more aware of the world around them.

We should never tire of asking questions ourselves, even though we tend to be less questioning of aspects of our lives as we accept readily or reluctantly the structure and values of our society.

In our gospel reading Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?". It was Peter, of course it was Peter, who responded with that famous confessional statement, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." When we reflect for ourselves on the question Jesus asked his disciples, we may well respond with a variety of definitions that reflect Biblical authority, the Creed, and our tradition. He is:

- ✝ Our saviour
- ✝ Our Lord
- ✝ Our redeemer
- ✝ Our King

✝ The Son of God

✝ The way, the truth and the light..

And so much more.

Interestingly, Matthew used the title 'Messiah' only in chapter 1, in verses 1, 16, 17, and 18. So, from Matthew's account, Jesus had not said he was the Messiah to his disciples or the crowds that flocked to see him. Those who did see Jesus were amazed at his authority and presence, and no doubt speculated as to whether he was the long-awaited Messiah. But none had been brave enough to ask him.

So, we may wonder, well I hope you do, why Jesus chose that moment to start a conversation with a question about who he was. Jesus had been travelling throughout Galilee with his disciples, and we get a sense as we read Matthew's gospel that the disciples are gradually recognising that Jesus is in fact the Messiah. Peter's response to Jesus' question was probably welcomed by the other disciples; it saved them from having to ask the question that they felt nervous asking. This is the crucial pivot point in Matthew's gospel. Jesus is in the northern most part of Galilee, in Caesarea Phillipi, and was turning to journey towards Judea and ultimately, Jerusalem. Galilee had been full of receptive and enthusiastic crowds. But, Jesus knew from that moment on, the reception would be different, and Matthew's gospel reflects that as Jesus starts to refer to his suffering, death, and resurrection in his conversations and teachings to the disciples.

In our reading Peter is the star pupil, giving the right answer, and Jesus responds by saying 'Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah!.. and Jesus goes on to say, "Peter, on this rock I will build my church... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven..."

Next week you will hear Peter being rebuked for his lack of support and sympathy for the divine agenda Jesus declares he must enact.

Peter's enthusiastic response to Jesus' question was correct, but it didn't lead him to fully understand what and who Jesus was. The title was correct, but he hadn't fully grasped the other aspects of Jesus and the implications of Jesus' messiahship.

I wonder if one of the take aways from this gospel reading is that like a young child we are to continue to ask questions; to be on a continual quest, to inhabit and live the question of who Jesus is, each day of our lives. Jesus used the metaphor of journeying, and I often think of faith as being on a personal journey. Peter understood Jesus as the Messiah but hadn't seen or understood the implications of that. There was so much more Peter had to learn, despite getting the answer right.

Peter could have responded to Jesus by reciting all the times Jesus had been an integral part of his life: calling him from his fishing boat to follow him; someone who healed his mother-in-law; who was happy to call him out of the boat and walk on the water, and also saved him from drowning when he started to sink beneath the waves; and the person who would wash his feet, looked into his eyes with sorrow when Peter denied knowing Jesus; and the man who set up a marvellous breakfast barbeque on the beach; and who gave Peter courage to preach at the day of Pentecost.

So when we think of Jesus and his question, we can answer it for today, and for different times in our past lives. How might we envisage answering it for the future?

Living this question, each and every day, helps us know Jesus each and every day, and enables us to invite him into our hearts time and

time again, to inspire us afresh, to ask what next, how might we be used for the heralding of God's kingdom on earth.

So, please don't believe you have all the answers about Jesus sown up; Jesus still has lots to show you and to help guide you through life.

In the letter to the Romans Paul urged that the Christians in Rome not to be conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that they may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. That means asking questions, living the questions of who you are called to be each and every day.

What an exciting prospect! Not necessarily a quiet life, but one where we are asking questions to better understand Jesus and the what we are being asked to do, for God's kingdom.

Live the questions, to be part of the body in Christ.