



St Marylebone
Parish Church

11th after Trinity 2020, 11am Holy Eucharist

Readings:

The Prophecy of Isaiah 51.1-6

The Holy Gospel according to St Matthew 16.13-20

‘Who do you say that I am?’ asks Jesus. He’s asking His disciples. Be in no doubt, in the Gospels that means He is asking us: ‘Who do you say that He is?’

We can’t answer that question in a single moment, or with hasty words. In a *sense* we’ll answer it when we say the Creed together in a few minutes, but in truth we know that **it takes a lifetime to answer this question.**

We *live* the answer to the question ‘Who do you say that I am?’ – it is an extraordinary invitation to a life radically full of faith, hope and love. Priorities, purpose, our money and time and energy: a life radically full of faith, hope and love.

But that’s not all today; today’s Gospel is no single scoop of lovely vanilla ice cream, its full: loads of flavours towered on top of one another, flake, sprinkles, sauce, the lot.

I haven’t lost the plot – look again.

There is such richness here in just a few lines.

You could spend years teasing out the theological meat: the role and ministry of the prophets and John the Baptist, Petrine authority as the prince of the Apostles,

the role of the Pope in God's household,
the authority to bind on earth and so in heaven.

(This has long been understood, of course, as an invitation to regular Confession outside of Sunday's Eucharist. As someone who gains huge benefit from this gift myself, I heartily commend it to you, and am always happy to chat about it.)

But, you see why these few short lines represent a bumper serving of theological ice cream flavours.

Not to mention (perhaps this is the flake on top of the ice cream Sunday? And yes I did mean ice-cream *Sunday* as a pun...) Jesus uses the title 'Son of Man'.

This Messianic title from the Old Testament book of Daniel means, when Son of Man and Son of God are held together in Jesus, we begin to *see* the answer to who Jesus is: 1. God made man, and 2. our human destiny: His perfect humanity.

It's all here, all of that, in just 7 verses.

"Who are you?" said the Caterpillar when Alice meets him in Wonderland. To her credit, she takes it rather existentially.

'Who are you?'

To answer Jesus' question with which we began 'who do you say that I am?' is, in a way, to answer the Caterpillar's question, too. Son of God and Son of Man. Jesus' divinity is

the answer to His humanity and vice versa; likewise with us. To answer the question of **who Jesus is, will also give us the answer, who am I?** The one answers the other.

And if it doesn't, if those two questions aren't two strands of one and the same in your life then, be excited (!) because we've got an exciting journey ahead: you and Jesus.

If our Christian life is un-integrated, or marginal, or tired, or predictable, or boring, then now is precisely the time to dig down and slap on that nourishing manure, to invest and grow. If our faith has become fossilised or paralysed, then it is near enough dead. Just like my plants when I came back from holiday – pour on the water, give 'em a good feed, trim back the dead and bring your relationship with God back to full leaf and life.

Who do you say that Jesus is?

Who are you?

Who do you *live* that Jesus is?

Look again at today's first reading, Isaiah is fizzing with promise and hope. 'Desert to garden', firm foundations of hope, the promise of God's coming Kingdom.

No wonder Isaiah says 'joy and gladness will be found in [us], thanksgiving and the voice of song.'

Who do you say that Jesus is?

Who are you?

Who do you *live* that Jesus is?

Priorities, purpose, our money and time and energy: a life radically full of faith, hope and love.

These are questions to be lived out with radical joy and tenacious hope.