

Sermon for Sunday the 16th September, 2018. Wisdom 7.26-8.1; Ps 19; James 2.18-26; Mark 8.27-38

In the gospel reading this morning Jesus asks his disciples two questions that refer to his identity. The first question is what we might call a general one – not too specific but one that refers to what the disciples have heard the people say about Jesus around the different places they have been with him in his ministry: *Who do people say that I am?* Jesus asks them.

Now this question attracts an answer that amounts to a type of collage of characters. The disciples suggest people think Jesus is John the Baptist – maybe even one of the prophets or perhaps even Elijah. Jesus listens to their responses. The second question Jesus asks his disciples, is far more direct and personal, *“Who do you say I am.”* And it is Peter who responds with his confession of faith: *“You are the messiah the Christ.”*

In the gospel of Mark, the recognition and revelation of Jesus as the Messiah is pivotal- the whole drama turns towards Jerusalem when Peter makes this proclamation. Things begin to change - and particularly in the relationship that Jesus has with his disciples. Things will be different now that his true identity has come into the light.

We could view this passage as a metaphor of our own life as followers of Christ. Once we confess that Jesus is the Christ, things change for us. Nothing is the same again when we begin our journey in him.

Returning to the Gospel story - Jesus immediate response to his disciples after Peters proclaims he is the Messiah is censure, not only of Peter but of all the disciples. He does this because he knows that they don't understand the way of his messiahship.

His messiahship inaugurates a totally new order of compassion, inclusivity and kenotic self-giving love. It is a leading from the heart and mind together with no need or want for elitism.

After Peter's confession of faith, Jesus begins to teach them about himself, his own suffering, his rejection, his coming death and his resurrection - and, he says to them that this is to be the pattern for all who follow him. The way of belonging to this new order is one of life, death and resurrection. For Jesus followers however it will be to do with their inner and outer journey.

“If any wants to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”

So how does this all fit in today's modern technological and scientific world. Does this still apply? Do we gain life by losing it for Christ sake and for the sake of the gospel?

Well yes we do. For in Christ we can lose our life in ways that we don't even recognize need to be lost. In Christ we can live in the oneness of God with the Holy Spirit in whom our dying to

self and rising in newness and fulfillment of who we are created to be in God's image actually happens. In Christ we can be transformed to be more like him.

Even in our present era of sophisticated ways of instant communication, mobile phones, twitter, Facebook, email and more I'm sure, we still live in a broken world full of broken people - many of whom have given up on anything that is not tangible or visible or proven as a reality in the world. Many of whom rely on the ways of the world for their reality.

Losing our life and gaining it means the same as it always did in the gospel – it means personally responding to Jesus call by living in communion with God and depending upon that relationship. It means accepting that God is within us, and it means nurturing that sacred space by dying to the inner falseness and corruptness that camouflages and hides it.

This is the reality as followers of Christ that we live in. it is not a worldly way of being – but it is the way, the truth and the life in Christ. This way of life means continual rebirth in God, and it means letting the God in us shine out to others through our presence and our works as James reminds us in the Epistle. In real terms it means answering the call to an ongoing process into a sacred unified self in him who calls us. A process that leads us into something that is far too deep, delicate and everlasting to be instantaneous. A process that needs time for reflection, recognition, acceptance, repentance and rejoicing.

I think we see something of this process in the life journey of the disciple Peter.

We know from the latter part of the gospel story, that Peter, the first to profess his faith in Jesus as the Christ, ends up denying three times that he even knew him!

And then there is Peter that we see after the first Pentecost, the Peter who follows the leading of the Holy Spirit into the God within him and had revealed the Peter who shone out for all to see in his wholeness as a courageous faithful lover of Christ till the end.

Like we see in the disciple Peter our journey as a disciple is a continuing process, with good days and bad days, advances and setbacks, yet there is on-going renewal.

We may live in a very different world to the world that Peter belonged to, but we remain as did Peter, creations of God made in his image and we remain reconciled to that image through Jesus Christ. It is, I believe, the same truth in every era – and a question for every era that Jesus asks of us "But who do you say that I am?"

The Lord be with you.