

23 August 2020

In our reading from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus asks the disciples a really big question: "Who do you say I am?"

Jesus had started off by asking what others say: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?". Several possibilities are mooted: John the Baptist (somewhat improbable, as Jesus and John were seen together several times, including when John baptised Jesus!); others said that he was one of the Old Testament prophets brought back to life, perhaps Jeremiah or Elijah. The latter theory was perhaps based on 2 Kings 2: Elijah had been walking with Elisha, and "suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind"; it was believed, based on Malachi 4.5, that Elijah would return to earth from heaven to announce the arrival of the Messiah.

But then Jesus turns the spotlight on the disciples: "what about you? ... Who do you say I am?"

Peter leaps in with the answer, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God". Top marks for the right answer! Jesus says that Peter has seen this truth through divine revelation. And he commends him with a play on words, for Peter's name in Greek – Cephas – means rock: "on this rock I will build my church".

Our reading stops there. Next week, we will hear Peter then blots his copybook. Jesus explains how he must go to Jerusalem and there he will suffer many things at the hands of the religious authorities and will be put to death but, on the third day, will be raised to life.

Peter may not have heard the last part, as he panics at the suggestion Jesus will suffer and be killed: "Never, Lord! ... This shall never happen to you!". Jesus rebukes Peter: "Get behind me, Satan! ... You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." In other words, Peter was seeing things through worldly eyes, not through the eyes of God.

If Jesus were to ask *you*, "Who do you say that I am?", how would you answer?

Is he someone you think about only on Sundays? Or is he someone who affects your life each and every day?

Jesus, whose name can be translated as "God is our salvation", has many titles: some emphasise his majesty, such as Lord and Messiah; some remind us that he gave up his life for us on the cross, such as Saviour and Redeemer; others are more intimate, more personal, such as Friend, Brother. It was Jesus who said that, like him, we can call God "our Father".

Jesus says to the disciples, and to us: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me". The way of the disciple is not an easy one, but we do not tread it alone – Jesus walks alongside us.

When you find things overwhelming, when you feel lost and alone, remember that you are not alone.

I pray that all of us may become more and more aware of the presence of Jesus, our friend and brother, in our daily lives. May we be open to his guidance and willing to receive his strength to sustain us on the way. Amen.