

Proper 16a

**Who do you say that I am?**

St Michael's Battersea, 27 August 2017

Jesus says; Who do you say that I am?

If you have been a Christian for a long time,  
you know some of the answers to this question,  
because you say them aloud whenever you come  
to Church.

I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God,  
true God,  
who is seated at the right hand of God in heaven,  
whose kingdom will have no end.

Really?

I've spent three years at university  
and nearly twenty as a priest  
and I'm not sure I'm that confident!

When I think about Jesus, I'm more like the crowds  
in his own time, trying to make sense of this man in  
the terms of people they know about already.  
The people who say,  
Jesus is like John the Baptist,  
Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

I find it easier to think of Jesus as a teacher,  
a friend, a visionary, or a challenging voice,  
than to understand what it means to say  
that Jesus is the Messiah,  
the anointed one, the Son of God.

Of course, the words of the Creed tell me what the  
Church believes  
and as a part of the Church,  
of the believing body of Christ,  
I want to believe and to live as a believer.

I know that means believing that Jesus loves me  
and forgives me,  
even though I don't feel I deserve it.

I know that means believing that I am called to  
follow him by living with the same generous love  
towards others that I see in him.

I know that means believing that the powers of  
death and hell cannot prevail against me in this life  
or the next.

But actions speak louder than words,  
and I have to admit that the way I live,  
the way I behave towards others,  
mostly doesn't witness to a confession,  
a belief, that Jesus is the Messiah,  
the Son of the Living God.

I suspect that I'm not alone,  
in knowing that there is a gap between what I say  
on Sunday and what I do the rest of the week.  
It is not deliberate, it is just human –  
I'm frail and full of faults,  
and it is hard to line up my life  
with the things I want to believe and do.

But I do know some things that help,  
so may be we can start there?

Before I arrived in London I was the vicar of a small  
church in Leicester.  
The building looked nothing like this, it was a  
modern concrete block with tall pointed end instead  
of a tower or spire.  
The congregation did look a bit more like yours;  
there were people from all over the Caribbean and  
Africa, as well as some from Iran, the Philippines  
and Poland.  
So when we were given a significant gift of money,  
to commission a statue of Jesus,  
we had to ask ourselves an interesting question...

Who is Jesus, for the people of Christ the King,  
Beaumont Leys?

We worked with a wonderful artist, who was also a  
priest, to talk about our picture of Jesus.

Some people spoke about Jesus the defender of  
the poor,  
others about the Jesus who healed,  
and others about Jesus their friend.  
We talked about what Jesus looked like,  
whether he was white like me or brown or black  
like you?

After the drawings had been approved,  
the artist went away and started carving  
a huge, seven foot, piece of oak  
to make our statue.  
As she was carving, she discovered a fault,  
a knot in the wood,  
just where the heart should be,  
so she carved the heart of Jesus into the statue,  
which had not been in the original drawing.  
When she was finished carving,  
she painted the wood in beautiful colours.

Sadly, I left the church before the statue was  
installed. But in some ways that doesn't matter,  
because the process of talking about it was almost  
as important as having it.

Through talking to each other,  
we heard the personal stories of faith in Jesus  
which we knew were real because we could see  
them in people's lives.

So for Jane, who grew up in poverty and hardship in Jamaica,  
Jesus was the defender of the poor who had given her the strength to lift herself out of poverty, through hard work and faith that she was worth more.

For Cedric, who had lost his wife and daughter to a terrible disease,  
Jesus was the friend and comforter, alongside him as he brought friendship and comfort to the lonely in our neighbourhood.

For Caroline, who had very little education in her early life,  
Jesus became the patient teacher, who opened up the world to her through Bible stories, which she loved to share with others in prayers and songs.

So today,  
I wonder if I could ask you to ask yourself the question,  
Who is Jesus for me?

Who is the Jesus that I believe in,  
The Jesus who other people could see in my life;  
in my relationships, in the way I use my money, my time and my energy?

Who do I really say that Jesus is?

I think that would be a wonderful start, especially if you had the confidence to share that with someone else.  
I don't know you well enough to ask you to do it now, or even over coffee,  
but perhaps you might think about it?

And then, I want us to wonder together for a moment or two what we actually *mean* when we say, with Peter, that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of the Living God.

I don't know if you know what follows after Peter has this moment of revelation,  
when for a single moment of inspiration he is right?

Almost immediately, he gets it wrong again!

After praising Peter, begins teaching the disciples about what it means to be the Messiah and how he will be persecuted, punished and eventually put to death.  
When Peter protests against this, Jesus rebukes him.

We know that Peter will keep on getting it wrong even after the resurrection of Jesus.

But because he knows he is wrong, he can learn and grow in faith.

Peter tries to walk on water and fails, so he learns that he needs to trust in Jesus and not himself.

Peter is outside the High Priest's house while Jesus is being tortured he denies knowing Jesus, but he sees that Jesus does not deny knowing him.

Peter flees from the tomb, but Jesus is waiting for him in the Upper Room.

Each time he is wrong, Peter is forgiven and given new insight, new understanding of who Jesus is.

He becomes stronger, more faithful, more reliable, more the person that Jesus saw when he called Peter, the Rock, the foundation of the church. Other people see this too, and come to believe in Jesus because of what they see in Peter's life.

So the good news for us today is not just that Jesus is the Messiah, but that he is a Messiah who understands our frailty and weakness, who forgives us and wants us to know him even more.

We will not know Jesus fully until we see him face to face,  
but let us pray that we will know him a little more and live the faith we believe, each day until then.

Let us pray

Jesus, Son of God  
Forgive us when our lives fall short  
Of all that you believe we can be  
And help us to know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly  
and follow you more nearly  
each day of our lives.  
Amen

Intercessions Sunday 27 August 2017

Loving God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, send your Holy Spirit into our hearts so that our prayers may speak of your will for the world.

We pray for your church,  
built on the faith of Peter and the other apostles.  
We pray for Christopher and Richard, our bishops,  
For John, our Archdeacon,  
For Tiff, and for all who lead and serve this church,  
May we, and all who share faith in you,  
live out that faith in the world,  
so that our words are not empty,  
but matched with actions of love and service.

Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer**

We pray for your world,  
Which you loved so much  
that you sent Jesus your son to live among us and  
die for us,  
For places where power is abused,  
And where leadership is exploited,  
For the people of Syria, Libya, Korea, Afghanistan,  
For people fleeing from violence and oppression  
For those affected by evil, through terrorism,  
neglect or exploitation.  
May we, and all who have freedom in this world,  
Be generous with the gifts you have given us  
And ready to meet the needs of others.

Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer**