

## **Pentecost 11 – Wesley 10.30am – 24<sup>th</sup> August 2014**

**Reading:** Matthew 16:13-20 'Peter's affirmation of faith'

**Text:** "You are the Christ, the son of the Living God" vs 16

**Theme:** 'Living our faith!'

### **Introduction**

The question to the disciples by Jesus remains a question we face every day: "Who will we say Jesus is?"

In other words, in our own minds and hearts what/who do we truly believe he is? Also, what sort of testimony do we offer about him through our words, actions and our lives? What will our loved ones, our congregations, our neighbours, our communities know about Jesus through us? This is the crux of the passage for us today. However, Peter's inspiration and his fallibility are seen in just a few verses. Initially, he has this God given inspiration as to who Jesus is and is blessed by him. But just a few verses later he is rebuked by Jesus for not understanding the spiritual aspects of Jesus' rejection, suffering, death and resurrection and Jesus says in vs 23 "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me;"

From the highs to the lows of faith in such a quick time. This last section, while not in the reading for today, helps to keep the context that for Peter, while he will lead the early church, he is also very fallible and there will be struggles both personally and as a church.

This for me makes the Gospel so real. There will be times of inspired faith and there will be times where I fail miserably and let others down and in so doing fail the one I call my Lord and Saviour. Does this destroy the relationship? Fortunately not, and this is also part of the miracle of our Christian faith, which is not only remarkable but also always gives hope no-matter what the situation.

### **Let us look closer at the passage – Matthew 16:13-20**

"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi,..."

Caesarea Philippi had a non-Jewish association. Emperor Augustus gave the town, originally called Paneas, to Herod the Great in 20 BCE. As a gesture of thanks, Herod built a temple to Augustus there and named it Caesarea. Herod's son Philip, upon the death of the emperor, enlarged the city and added his own name to it in order to distinguish it from Caesarea Maritima, a city on the Mediterranean. Hence the setting is in a pagan place where this amazing conversation takes place.

For a moment think of amazing places where you have had faith conversations? For me, one of the most interesting faith conversations occurred on a train going from Singapore through Kuala Lumpur and on to Penang. In KL a young Muslim woman, who turned out to be a university student, boarded the train and sat next to me as there were very few seats left. We got into conversation and it turned to religion as I mentioned that I was a Christian military Chaplain. She asked me all sorts of faith questions including how I became a Christian. She mentioned that she had a number of Christian friends at university who openly shared their faith in a way that she was not used to as a Muslim. I found this an extra-ordinary conversation because she was a Muslim and a woman and here she was speaking with a Christian clergyman.

I have no idea what has happened to her, whether she continues as a Muslim or whether through her friends and a God co-incidence she thought further about Christianity. Totally an unknown there, but for me it was a God moment that has left an indelible print on my brain!

Jesus asks the disciples: "But who do you say I am?" Peter answered: "You are the Messiah, The Son of the Living God." Vs 16

This is the only confession in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. All other recognitions of who Jesus is are indirect. The concept of the 'Son of the living God' seems to point to an individual – that is, Jesus – who is to be worshipped as one in whom God is immediately encountered. In short, in this pithy phrase one finds the proclamation that Jesus is the embodiment of a God who is present and eminently powerful.

Jesus' response to Peter is indeed moving.

Firstly Jesus says this insight 'is not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.' It is a divine revelation.

Secondly there is a play on words that follow: "And I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church'. Vs 18

The Greek for Peter is '*petros*' literally a detached stone and rock in the Greek is '*petra*' which literally means bedrock or the solid foundation. The 'rock' identified in the passage appears to be this Petrine Confession.

The third aspect here is the expression '*my church*' (*'ecclesia'*) found only in Matthew twice and is nowhere else in the Synoptic Gospels. Here we have Christ talking about the faith community that is to come into being at Pentecost, but in a sense has begun already with the disciples and the wider followers.

A lot has been made of verse 19 spoken to Peter by Jesus:

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The 'keys of the kingdom of heaven' flow from Peter's faith statement of 'who Jesus is'. These are obviously not physical keys to unlock a door but spiritual keys to unlock aspects of Jesus' teaching about himself and the kingdom of heaven.

Much of this teaching has been in Matthew chapters 13-15 which have been the core of our readings over the past six weeks. In a sense, Jesus is passing on the mantle of teaching and understanding to Peter which led to him being the new leader of the infant church at Pentecost and afterwards. The 'binding' and 'loosening' is the ability to forgive or withhold forgiveness. This is given to the fledgling church at Christ's behest through Peter.

### **What about all this for us today**

The first point that needs to be said is that Peter is not 'the rock'. Rather 'the rock' is Peter's testimony: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

So often we have believed in individuals only to be let down by them. "I don't go to church anymore because of this or that or because this person said something I didn't like or the actions of that person weren't compatible with what I understand Christ taught!" We've all heard this said! Hello – we are all human – Peter sure was and he let Jesus down badly, yet on his faith confession he was entrusted with the early church. There is hope for you and me!!! That is what this passage teaches. Believe in Christ, believe in God inspired confessions but beware of our humanness!

Secondly know true forgiveness is to be found in Christ which offers freedom and hope for the now and the future.

Share your faith, what you understand of your faith and allow God through Christ to do the rest. See what happened through Peter, nowhere near perfect, yet on occasions given God inspiration, despite his human flaws. Also he was given leadership of the early church. Amazing how God can use us in spite of our flaws. Praise be to God. Amen.

### **Let us pray**

Lord Jesus, here we are as your church. We know some of the many ways we fail to be your obedient people. Often, when we want to be courageous, we are cowards. Sometimes when we want to be faithful we are unfaithful. And yet knowing us better than we know ourselves, you chose us to be your church and your bodily presence in the world, to reach out to the world in your name. Give us what we need, dear Lord, to be faithful to your vocation. Forgive us when we disappoint you by the poor quality of our discipleship. Remind us anew of the plans that you have to win a rebellious world back to you through us. We are amazed by the faith you have in us!

**Thank you for that faith. Amen.**