

**Sermon:** Who is our identity in?

**Reading:** Matthew 16:13-20

### **Introduction**

Today's reading is all about identity, the question Jesus asks His disciples is more important than many people realise. The question Jesus asks becomes the most important question ever asked in the whole of history because the answer we give has serious implications for our lives in this world and our eternal souls.

### **Identity theft**

Each one of us as we go through life will be allocated a series of numbers by which we can be identified on data bases. From our birth which was registered, we are allocated a national insurance number and as we progress through life our name and details are recorded on so many data bases I shudder to think.

We have bank account numbers, policy and registration documents which have specific numbers for our home, car and life insurances (if we have them). Most people now have a mobile phone number which is uniquely registered to us with a personal number by which we can be contacted.

With so much identity theft and fraud at the moment its important my data is held secure and cannot be abused and used maliciously by others in identity theft or fraud.

When we planned our last house move we contacted a removal company to give us a quote for our move. The company impressed me because he said, 'All our operatives carry ID badges and he showed me a copy of the ID so we know what it looks like. Identity is important, you don't want fraudsters loading the entire contents of your home onto a wagon and never see either of them again. Where do we we find our identification?

### **Context**

Jesus asks the question, 'Who do people say I am?' - The disciples respond by sharing what they have heard others saying about Jesus. Some think you are one of the prophets who has come back to life, others say you are a good teacher, a holy man, a rabble rouser etc. It seems many people held different opinions as to the identity of Jesus.

I've discovered this is a good question to ask others when sharing your faith 'Who do they say Jesus is?' This provides us with a good starting as we can first clarify any misconceptions, let me explain.

Here are some responses to the Jesus identity question I have heard people say.....

Jesus is a mythical character who didn't exist

Jesus was a man whose reputation grew out of exaggerated stories

Jesus was a good man who wanted to show the world a different way to live

Jesus was a Rabbi in the ancient world but nothing special

He is God's son. Although

So lets deal with some of these misconceptions first.....

How do we know Julius Caesar existed?

Did you know there is more evidence for the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ than there is for Julius Caesar? We have historical evidences for the life of Jesus and how He died and references to His miracles and resurrection from secular, historical sources.

Jesus was born into this world at a particular point in time in history, at a town in the City of David. He came from Nazareth and lived and ministered in Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum. He was arrested and tried under Pontius Pilate, crucified, died and was buried. All of this is available from history and archeology, Jesus as a real person in history is not in question or doubt.

Some say the stories about Jesus became exaggerated as they were retold over the years.

In order to respond to this suggestion I would call St. Luke to the witness, (stand so to speak). We know Luke was not one of Jesus twelve disciples. Luke became a follower of Jesus later and accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys after Jesus resurrection. Luke was an educated man, a doctor by trade and according to his gospel he decided to check out for himself to see if the events of Jesus are true or if these are simply tall tales exaggerated over time.

Luke records, 'Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, i too decided to write an orderly account for you most excellent Theophilus so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught' **(Luke 1:1-4)**.

Luke provides us with an orderly, investigated account, from eye witnesses interviews he conducted. Many of these would have been so easy to check out as there was up 20,000 people fed with the five loaves and two fish. Being a doctor I assume Luke was interested in the healing aspect of Jesus' ministry because he records more healing miracles than any other gospel writer. This was obviously a keen area of interest for him to investigate. Many people would still be able to testify to back up the accounts as Luke checked out the accounts. Luke would not have included false healing, why would he?

Was Jesus just a man who wanted to show the world how to live by love and preached a message of love! Think about this for a moment. Jesus was more than an ordinary man, Luke has just confirmed this for us in the healing miracles he investigated. So Jesus has to be more than just a good man and a good teacher. But if we leave the miracles aside for a moment and consider this - People who are considered nice people who speak about loving each other, looking after the poor, feeding the hungry, looking after the sick etc, these people are given awards and accolades for their humanitarian endeavours and achievements, we don't crucify nice people!!

**CS Lewis** said this,

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." So Jesus identity is important.

## **Turning the table!**

Jesus listens to all the things what others have said about Him, then He makes the question personal, “Who do YOU say I am?”

Peter always likes to be the first speaks up, he affirms his belief that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah but more than that, Jesus is The Son of God.

Peter is convinced through all he has seen, he could recall many miracles, including the raising of a widow’s son in Nain, the calming of the storm, casting out of demons, feeding the 5000. No man is capable of doing these things unless He is divine, God in flesh dwelling amongst us. But what is amazing and intriguing after all of this evidence that many people had witnessed with their own eyes, Peter was the first to declare Jesus as the Son of God. What intrigues me is Jesus commends Peter saying, this has been revealed to you by my Father in heaven. This confession can only come through revelation from God not from observation!

John writes this, “No one can come to Mw unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day’ (**John 6:44**).

So after Peter’s declaration, Jesus says he is blessed because his eyes have been opened to this fact. “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven” (**Matt 16:17**)

## **Turning Point**

This is a momentous revelation and becomes a turning point in the life of the disciples as it does in our lives when we have this revelation for ourselves. Their eyes have been opened and hearts strangely warmed, these men have made the true confession of belief that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus tells them they are now ready to receive more revelations and so the focus of the gospel of Jesus ministry picks up a pace. Things are never going to be the same again everything changes from this point forward. Now the disciples know who Jesus truly is, the Scriptures tell us, “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (**Matt 16:21**).

Jesus had refrained from telling His disciples about His death and resurrection until they had reached this point: It makes sense, you don't teach a child trigonometry before they have mastered the basics of mathematics. As they are learning more about Jesus so what they are told by Jesus because more taxing and challenging.

Jesus has been preparing them and they are ready to receive more revelations of what is to come. This blows the minds of the disciples, they were thinking of a kingly reign but Jesus starts speaking of rejection and dying! This cant be right, surly Jesus is mistaken!!!! The disciples understandably still have a hard time processing what Jesus was sharing with them, as evidenced in Peter’s response (**Matt 16:22-23**).

## **Our Turning Point**

If I was to ask each of us reading this today, ‘Who do you say Jesus is?’ Would you respond saying,

He is the eternal Son of God,  
Light from Light,  
God from God,  
of one being with the Father.

The Word made flesh and dwelt amongst us (**John 1:14**) who died and rose again in accordance with the Scriptures and say, He is my God, my Saviour?

Do you have eyes to see Jesus is the Lamb of God who gave up His life as a ransom for many, to take away my sins? (**John 1:29/ Matt 10:45**). But death could not hold Him nor the grave contain Him and so rising on the Third Day as He promised in accordance with the Scriptures. Can we say of Jesus, He is the Lord of lords, the King of kings, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. The one through whom all of creation was made and was made for. (Colossians 1) Do you know Jesus as the.....

Doorway of deliverance

The Pathway to peace

The gate to glory

The road to righteousness

and the Highway to holiness

Is this your Jesus? If you answer yes, have you ever confessed this with your lips? When we believe and make confession it makes a shift in our faith and our walk with God. This marks a turning point in our life.

### **Peter's Confession**

Peter was bold and fervent in his faith. He wanted to be the first to walk on water and was the first to reach the empty tomb ahead of the other disciple on that Easter morn. Peter was the first to identify Jesus as the Son of God and Peter was the first to take the gospel message out to the Gentiles, to share the good news, God had made a way for them to be included in His family in the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus says to Peter, upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome or prevail against it. Are we building the church on that foundation, upon the confession of Peter that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. We have a gospel to proclaim. This foundation stone is what everything else is built from. If we begin building the church on a different foundation stone than Peter's confession as to Jesus identity, we are proclaiming a different gospel and Paul warns of this in the letter to the Galatians.

### **The creed**

Paul quotes and refers to a creed written possibly within 3 years of Jesus resurrection and quotes it with the words, it is of 'First Importance' saying, 'For what I passed on to you as of first importance: that ***'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve'*** (1 Cor 15:3-6).

### **Summary**

Now you can see why this question requires a thorough answer as the confession of faith in Jesus has power to save us through what He has done on the cross. So **'If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved'** (Rom 10:9). It is upon Peter's confession of Jesus which the church must build and with our own lips make our confession of faith. So when we make the good confession, our identity changes. Spiritually we have a new birth certificate, and we do not need to have a unique serial number to identify us from others as God Himself knows us personally even down to the very hairs on our heads. No one can ever steal our identity in Christ. Romans 8 says nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. We are no longer serial number amongst millions of others, we are now adopted into God's family as His sons and daughters, known by name, children of God. This is our new identity. If we remain in Him He will remain in us and our identity remains secure and our eternal identity and destiny are in Him. To whom do we belong? **Amen**