

SERMON - SUN 5th July 26 – 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings:

Exod 1:8 – 2:10

Ps 124

Rom 12:1-8

Matt 16:13-20

Opening Prayer

I bring you grace and peace from God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who IS Jesus ?

In our Gospel reading from Matthew 16 this morning, Jesus gets right to the very heart of the matter with Peter and the disciples.

The disciples tell him what people were saying at the time; maybe he was ...

- John the Baptist
- Elijah
- Jeremiah or one of the prophets

But Jesus wasn't content with these guesses.

He drills right in to Simon Peter ... *"But who do YOU say that I am?"*

Simon Peter's answer - *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

To which Jesus responds, *"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven."*

Accepting and acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, is fundamentally really all he asks of us. Everything else flows out from there. It is on THIS rock that he can build his church.

You might imagine, then, that the Gospel settles the matter. But people being people, have continued to argue about it ever since.

Believe me, there really are not many crazy ideas about Jesus that have not been explored. The early Christians came up with some pretty startling ideas. Things that today we call heresies...

There were the **Docet-ics**, like **Marcion** in the 2nd century, who said that Jesus wasn't real, but some kind of projection of God, like a hologram, too holy to be sullied by actually touching this world.

This idea denies Jesus' humanity – he is **all God and no man**.

But how can a projection ever truly understand what it is to be human?
How can it enter into the striving and the pain, the mud and the blood and the suffering, yes, but also the joy, the wonder, the beauty and the love,
... but, OH, the love.

Then there was **Appolinarius**, a 4th-century bishop in Syria, who said that Jesus was a man, with a human body, but a divine mind, - like he had somehow had his brain scooped out and was occupied by God. Like some kind of puppet.

I kid you not - these are for real.

And some of these ideas were championed by big names of the day, and they gained quite the following.

You think influencers are a modern phenomenon :-)

Then there is the old chestnut that Jesus was just a good man, a wise teacher, perhaps the wisest that has ever lived. Inspired, perhaps. A prophet, even. But nevertheless, just a man.

This one we still hear quite a lot today, in our 'age of enlightenment'.
I'm sure you will have heard it – yes?

So **all human and no God**.

The problem with this idea is that however amazing he was, he lived and died, like any other man. He did not rise again; he does not offer us anything other than some human wisdom. No salvation. No redemption. No reconciliation with God. No eternal life.

And one only has to read Jesus' own words to know that this IS what he offers.
It IS what he himself claimed.
It IS what he himself did.

- C.S. Lewis is pretty good on this point.

Lewis argued that a mere human who said the things that Jesus said could not be a great moral teacher. He must be either a madman out of his mind; a liar who knowingly misled people; or indeed what he claimed to be - the Son of God.

It took many years of debate to try to thrash out these arguments; hundreds of years of it, in fact. From the first Ecumenical Council in Nicea, 325 A.D. via subsequent

ones in Constantinople, Ephesus, Chalcedon, and many others, right through to Nicea again, 787 A.D. - all these factions together to argue it out.

And what conclusion did they come to?

... well, as hard to get your head round as it seems, and as it really IS difficult, Jesus can be no less than FULLY God and FULLY human.

And if that is hard to resolve, folks, remember this is God we are talking about. If you think you have got him figured, well, you probably haven't !

So, who is Jesus? - What would your answer be?

- what would you have answered to Jesus, that day in Caesarea Philippi ?
- what would you say about him to someone else?
- what DO you say ?

I challenge you to come up with a 30 second account for somebody asking you that question. Think about it. Write it down. Learn it.

Be prepared to give it at an unexpected moment.

Think about a gracious response for those who reject or refute you.

And think about what to do if they don't ?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, give us the wisdom and the insight of Simon Peter, to truly see you for who you are, and to understand what that means for us as individuals, and for all humanity. Give us the courage to speak out that truth, not only to ourselves, but to others, Lord, that you might truly be known.

Amen!