

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (Ordinary 24)

15-09-2024

St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Proverbs 1: 20-33 Warning against rejecting Wisdom

Psalm 19 God's greatness – Loving God's Law

James 2: 18-26 Faith and Good deeds go together
Faith without deeds is dead

Mark 8: 27-38 Peter's declaration about Jesus
Jesus predicts his death and resurrection
His followers must take up their Cross

Introduction

Today I'd like to focus in on the Gospel reading we've just heard, and I'd like to look at it in two parts.

Firstly, I'd like to look at Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?". And, secondly, I'd like to look at the action Jesus calls for in response to Peter's answer.

Jesus Question

Jesus actually asks two questions.

The first is, "Who do people say that I am?"

The second is, "Who do you say that I am?"

The way we answer this question effects how we respond to Jesus.

When asked the first question the disciples answered Jesus. Well, some people say, John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets. At other times the religious leaders of the day referred to Jesus as a blasphemer, and a drunk, and a glutton. Their response to who Jesus was, effected their response to his message and as such they chose not to listen to Jesus.

When asked, "Who do you say that I am?", Peter responds for the disciples and says, "You are the Messiah."

For quite a while I used to wear a band on my right wrist with the letters WWJD, which stands for "What Would Jesus Do." One boss once told me I needed to change it to WWKD, his name was Ken.

I was thinking that before we can look at the question, "What Would Jesus Do.", we really first need to start with the question, WDYSTIA? - "Who do you say that I am?"

One of the real joys and challenges of being the minister here at St Cuthbert's is talking to parents at Baptism interviews. I endeavour to get them to think about the question, "Who is Jesus for you?", because who Jesus is for us, will determine how we respond to Jesus.

At Baptism, the Christian rite of initiation, we are asked the question, "Do you turn to Christ?" Before we can answer this question well, we need to know who Jesus really is.

Peter said that Jesus was the Christ, but very soon after Jesus has to tell Peter, "Get behind me Satan". How can that happen? Peter knew Jesus was the Messiah, but he had a human take on it. Peter needed to listen very carefully to Jesus and get God's take on who the Messiah is, and what the Messiah is calling us into.

Our response to Jesus

So, if we answer like Peter, "You are the Christ" or "Messiah" in the translation we have used this morning, then what does that mean for us?

In a book called "The Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham", it spoke of how Billy came to a point where he was challenged that Jesus was either an imposter and a fraud or he was who he said he was. He decided the only way he could work it out was to commit his life to Jesus and follow him. The rest, as we say, is history. Billy Graham went on to become the most well known evangelist of the 20th Century. His influence continues with his grandson preaching here at the gold coast just this year.

But how does Jesus respond to Peter's claim. He tells them to keep it a secret. As we heard last week, this was only until Jesus' earthly ministry had been completed. Jesus knew that it was not only in his Incarnation, Life and Teachings, but also in his Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, that his coming could be really grasped. That is when Jesus gave the disciples the commission, that is also ours. As Christians today we are also called to share the Good News of Jesus with others.

I recall a story from the Alpha course, there was a young man who wanted to accept and follow Jesus, but he was absolutely terrified of telling others about it. A wise older Christian took him aside and said to him, "I'm sure God would make an exception for you." So, the young man gave his life to Christ and became a Christian. He was so excited about it that he went home and told his family that he had become a Christian, and he didn't even need to tell anyone about it. If you become a Christian, you should tell someone. It is in the telling, the sharing with someone else, that makes it real for us. We are of course designed for relationships, with God and with one another.

If we acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, we say that he is both Saviour and Lord. I think we get the bit about being our Saviour. The idea of being saved gives us security. Lord might be a bit more difficult for us though. We live in a society and culture which focuses on the individual and the rights of the individual. If Jesus is Lord for us, then we need to hand control of our lives over to him and not ourselves.

Today we hear Jesus say if we are his followers then we are to take up our cross and follow him.

Not our way like Peter had in mind, but Jesus' way. Now obviously this will mean different things for different people. In Billy Graham's case it led to preaching to millions of people all around the world. For us it might mean being here today, it might be the prayers we say for friends, or being part of a Bible Study, or helping out around the Church.

Taking up our cross though, will require something of us. There is a saying, "we all have our crosses to bear", but that is not what Jesus is talking about here. Taking up our cross, is not something that happens to us, but rather something we chose to do.

In the reading from James today we hear,

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

Our acknowledgement, of Jesus as the Christ, calls us to action. This action will be different for each of us, but I think one of the keys to be able to work out, what it might be, and how we might do it, is to have other Christians around us, to support us. As human beings we never live in a vacuum. Our identities are shaped by the communities in which we live. Being a part of, and engaged in, a Christian faith community should empower us, to work out what our cross is, and also help us to carry it.

Conclusion

So, if we, like Peter, acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. If we accept what he has done for us in his life, death and resurrection. Then we are called to take up our cross and follow him. I can't tell you what that cross will be, that's something that you have to work out with Jesus for yourself. The stakes are high, but the rewards are great.

Our sentence for today say's this:-

Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it.

Amen.