

“Who are you? Who are we?”

(Matthew 16:13-20)

10:00am Holy Communion– 23rd August 2026

Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

<Prayer>

Last week I had my bi-annual MDR check. Do you know what that is? Does it sound like an invasive medical procedure for men? No, it’s worse and a lot more painful – MDR is my Ministerial Development Review, a Human Resources-type meeting normally administered by an Archdeacon or a Bishop. It’s part of that whole professional development thing, looking for needs, opportunities and wellbeing, for support and care of clergy. I’m grateful for the opportunity, really, I am!

MDR is where others get to say things about me – members of the team, colleagues and churchwardens. They can write their thoughts and send them in. So how is Chris doing? Absolutely rotten, or maybe just okay! **Have you ever been assessed like that?** Actually, it is good to talk about these business-like things of leadership and performance. In the clergy vocation, just as significant (or maybe more so) are those foundations of *faith, calling and prayer*. It's important that others see that in me. Or to put it another way – *does Chris find his identity in Christ?* **So, who do people say that I am?** You could even have an MDR for the whole church. **Who do people say that we are?**

<pause>

I'm just going to draw your attention to the notice sheet you have with you, which as I'm sure you know it has the scripture readings for the day. Our first reading (*wonderfully read by Peter*) is a key passage from Paul's Letter to the Romans; **chapter 12 is a pivotal moment**. See again the opening phrase - '*I appeal to you therefore*'. Everything which has gone before in Paul's letter – 11 chapters – is now being brought down to the **real, practical and lived reality of what belief in Christ will be *in the person (in the individual)* and then in the people who are the church (together)**. The advent of Christ in their individual lives is going to change each of them to become something renewed for God – a holy people, distinctive and offering Christ to those around them. **We now call that the Church.**

Here I'm picking out five things which I think Paul is saying:

- ❖ To be aware of your limitations. Be humble. The Church has wonderful things, but they are ours by '**the mercies of God**', not by right.
- ❖ Know that God will make up your limitations. If you bring even what little you think have, that is still '**holy and acceptable to God**'. It's good to remember that **sacrifice is never from surplus**.
- ❖ God *accepts* what we bring in sacrifice, and that humble act begins the '**transformation of our renewed minds**'. As we give at cost to ourselves then we can better see and feel the true worth of all things. Then that we will be better able to '**discern the things of God**'.
- ❖ All of that will change us, renew us, drawing us towards what God shall accept as His living Church, present in Rome or in Haslemere. **So, humility and sacrifice lead to transformation and acceptance.**

And that could be our Ministerial Development Review. All of this is to get the Church noticed by those outside and around, allowing the question to be answered ***who are these people?***

Now let's get a quick look at Matthew's gospel passage and make some comparisons to Romans:

Here is a very well-known passage and again it's a pivotal point. Peter the disciple makes his confession that Jesus is '**The Messiah, the Son of the living God**.' A lot has been seen and done by Jesus. It's time for a review. Is he now being recognised for what he is: '**Who do people say that the Son of Man is?**'

Together the disciples answer with comparisons to some of the greats of their historical faith – ‘Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ All the crowds knew Jesus was something special, a work of God breaking in. Is he about the join that Hall of Fame? But God has assigned much more to Jesus. **Who is he?** As Peter was first to say: ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’

Well, that must have been the right answer. Look what happens next - the subject goes from Jesus to Peter. That question to the disciples: ‘who do people say that I am?’ immediately pivots to the subject now being now about Peter’s identity. Peter confesses his belief in Jesus as the Christ to be Son of God and – click! – his eternal identity is changed – in his case to be the Rock upon which the risen and ascended Christ will build his church. ‘Blessed are you, Simon (Peter) son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.’ **When a person confesses Christ, then their true eternal identity is fully established at that moment. Recognising Christ and being recognised by Christ.** It’s true for us too. **When we embrace Christ in all He is, then we are given a new character ourselves, immediately.** Our two passages go together well today.

Therefore, what is that character? It’s what Paul has told us. It will be our **humility and sacrifice leading to transformation and acceptance.** **My point here today is to think of the world in its need for such clear and evident Christian identity, to be met by us personally and by the whole Church.**

<pause >

Can you think of the time in your life when you were most frightened? I know people some here amongst us who have been told the most awful news of health and family disaster. I have known some of those experiences myself so far. I was once lost as a child in London, 10 years old and separated from the school group I was with. It was quite serious! Maybe I will tell that full story another day. But I can predict something else very frightening for me, *and it's not happened yet*. This one comes straight out of scripture, like God giving me my life's MDR review in eternity. In Matthew's gospel, chapter 7 it says:

'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?" Then I will declare to them, "**I never knew you.**"

My purpose here is not to frighten you with it either! But it does speak to our precious identity as a critique of our relationship with Christ, Son of the living God. **There is no substitute in mere occupation and activity alone. We may be busy-bees in the church hive, but under it all is the essential Christian identity of humility and sacrifice leading to transformation and acceptance.** That is what needs to be seen. As people and a Church of such identity we can (and need to be) known as Christ's disciples by many people. That is what makes the church grow and flourish, bringing even more acceptance and transformation where it is needed.

<pause>

What does it mean to be assigned a measure of faith?

‘For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.’ I understand faith to be constant and developing interaction with God, throughout our lives.

So don’t be frightened of making a bit of personal review of your faith. We are all less than perfect, all with slightly flawed identities. Who are you? That important question, ask often, keeps open the virtuous journey of **humility and sacrifice leading to transformation and acceptance.**

You need it, the Church needs it, and the world needs it too.

Amen