

**Sermon preached at Marlborough Road Methodist Church
at the Evening Service on Sunday 20th September 2015
by Rev Rob Anning**

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

The eagle-eyed amongst the congregation will notice that this is the lectionary gospel reading for last week. This morning we had the set gospel for today.

For us reading Mark's gospel in 2015, we know who Jesus is from the off, for in Mark 1 v 1 he writes: "This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God".

But when we read Mark's gospel, we discover that the disciples were not at all certain who he was, and it takes them until Chapter 8, half way through the gospel, to discover who he is. Jesus questions on the way in to Caesarea Philippi: "Who do people say that I am?" And "Who do you say that I am?" elicit the answers: Was he John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the Prophets? Or Peter's response: "You are the Messiah".

Here is the tipping point, the fulcrum of Mark's gospel. For from now on, Jesus begins to point the way to Jerusalem and to the Cross. Mark has it right at the beginning by calling Jesus "Christ" which means "the anointed one", the Son of God. And Peter has at last got it right by saying Jesus is the "Messiah" the Saviour.

Now, we and the disciples are joined together in the knowledge of who Jesus is. Now we really know who Jesus is, don't we? But is knowing his name sufficient to know who he is? By knowing his name, do we really know who Jesus is? It is important that we do try and discover the real Jesus, both in the Gospels, and also in the way we meet him in our daily lives.

Over the 150 years this church has stood, Christians here have been trying to answer the question about who Jesus is, and then share that knowledge with others. Jesus in that time has not changed, but the world has, and we have been required to get to know Jesus over and over again, and share him with "the present age".

If for some reason the press needed to know something more about me, they would dig into my past. Just knowing I was a "compositor" or a "Methodist Minister" would not be enough. They would contact the places where I have worked. They would speak to friends, family and others, and they would put together a picture that would be partly true and accurate but not entirely. Surely the best way, the authentic way, is to come and meet me face to face and after some discussion, come to their own conclusion.

Ronald Greer, an American author and counsellor, wrote a book called: "If you know who you are, you will know what to do". If we are to be followers of Jesus, then we can only be like Jesus if we really know not just who he is, but what he did and what he stood for. And then we will know how to act. Peter and the disciples seems by now to know who Jesus is, but it doesn't take them long, a verse and a half to be precise, to once again struggle with knowing who Jesus really is. Messiah yes, but what kind of Messiah?

Jesus is someone who cares for his disciples, and so he begins to prepare them for what is to come: v31: “Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer much . . .” In verse 32, Peter takes Jesus aside and begins to rebuke him. We don’t know what that rebuke consisted of; probably something about the morale of the group, about them not letting anything bad happen to Jesus, and so on. But Jesus is nothing if he is not honest with them as he is with us.

So where did you as a Christian get to know Jesus? Was it in your childhood, at school or Sunday school? Was it from your parents? Was it from attending church, or a Bible Study group? From something you read?

Is this the Jesus you know? This is something like my Jesus:

- Jesus is the one who loves even enemies.
- He forgives endlessly.
- He turns the other cheek.
- He goes the extra mile.
- He feeds the hungry and gives drink to the thirsty.
- His every word, his every move, promotes the Kingdom of God here on earth, often turning our standards upside down.
- And ultimately he gives his life that we might live.

Some of that description I got from the past. But more and more that description has come in recent years, through reading the Bible, through prayer about moral puzzles, through listening to others and then reflecting for myself. Over my lifetime, my picture of Jesus has changed continually. In that way, he has become my Jesus for today, for this moment in my life. It has been a process of development. That process of discovery will never end. It takes effort, thought and prayer. But who I think he is allows me to be accurately more like him. We are all called to ask that same question of Jesus in Mark 8: Who do you say that I am? The answer helps us to know how to be a Christian in the world today.