

**Sunday August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 : We worship together while apart**

**“ Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God”**

**Collect:** Almighty God, we are taught by your word that all our doings without love are worth nothing. Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love, the true bond of peace and of all virtue; through JESUS Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Readings:

Isaiah 51:1-6

Psalm 124

Romans 12: 1-8

**THE HOLY GOSPEL:**

**Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”<sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”<sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.”<sup>20</sup> Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.**

**The Sermon:** Two questions asked by Jesus that have echoed through two millenia. Who do people say that I am? And who do you say that I am? The first question requires only knowledge to answer, the second requires personal commitment.

We've heard the answers from back then, and Peter, to be clear, got it absolutely right, but what would the answers be from those in our time? Who do people today say that Jesus is? Many say He was a great, noble, moral, wise teacher. And some say He was a good man, but greatly deluded. And some say He was a liar. Let's look at these suggested answers within the framework of a book by C.S. Lewis entitled "Mere Christianity".

**Noble, wise, moral teacher?....** Jesus Himself denied the accolades. Jesus directed everything He did to the glory of the Father. He said that only the Father was good. He wasn't looking for people to admire Him. He was looking for people who were willing to die with Him to honour the Father's love.

**Sadly deluded?** C S Lewis really understands that notion. Jesus, after all, claimed the inconceivable! He claimed to be one with Father, He claimed to be able to forgive sins, He claimed to be a fountain of life, He claimed to be the Son of God come to deliver the world from evil, and death, and sin. If a person today made the same claims, we'd take him or her to a hospital. What Jesus claimed about Himself is in the same category as someone saying "I'm Napoleon" or, in Lewis words "I'm a fried egg". But had Jesus been taken to a hospital the doctors would have found no evidence of mental illness. No lack of focus, depression, paranoia, strange voices...none. Rather they have found a joyful, well-integrated, quite charming personality, strong in character and ethical in action. There would be no evidence of mental illness at all.

**If** Jesus was lying, He would have to be the most diabolical person who ever lived. Consciously egging people on to impossible commitment, taunting them with notions of eternal life, and assuming for Himself the glory due to God alone. Whenever there's a lie, however, there has to be a pay off. That's why people lie, after all. To get out of trouble, to make themselves appear better than they are. What Jesus said brought Him nothing but trouble, brought Him death by execution. What Jesus said pointed people to the Father. The most wonderful things He said or did He cautioned His disciples to keep silent about. Jesus wasn't looking for any pay off. So Liar doesn't fit either. **We bump right up against the astonishing idea that He was telling the truth. That He was the Truth, just as He claimed.**

Peter received that inner knowledge directly from God Himself as we read in our Gospel this morning. Jesus asks those two questions. While Matthew and John and James might have been still scratching their heads, Peter suddenly speaks out: **“You are the Messiah, the Anointed One the Christ, the Son of the Living God”**. Jesus affirmed Peter’s words – Jesus agreed with Peter - saying “Blessed are you, Peter, for human beings have not revealed this to you but rather God Himself has placed this truth within your heart”. What a joy for Peter.

A joy for Peter and a pattern for us. All of the disciples had been with Jesus for quite a while by this time. They had listened, watched, participated, and marvelled. They had all the information they needed to know who Jesus was. But understanding does not come from information alone....nor does it come from companionship alone....not even from knowing trusted sources or prophets of the Old Testament. Understanding is the gift of God to those who dare to commit to **believing** . Spiritual information is for everyone with ears to hear; but **spiritual understanding** is the gift of God alone.

So there is no blame to be attached to the other disciples, and there is no credit to be attached to Peter. When Jesus says "Blessed are you, Simon: He is not saying that Simon Peter is holy, or worthy, or smart, or better...He is saying that Peter should be very HAPPY because God the Father decided to give him that incredible gift of insight. Jesus uses the same word He chose in the Beatitudes where “blessed” means having “BRAVO HALLELUIA JOY.”

And then Jesus Himself passes on to Peter an amazing promise. Peter is given the **Keys** of the Kingdom and is told that what he looses on earth will be loosed in heaven, and what he binds on earth will be bound in heaven. What can that mean? Well, forget those pictures of Peter at the Pearly Gates determining who gets in....not in the Scripture, nope! **Keys** were the symbol of the rabbis. Keys meant setting boundaries, setting limits, teaching people to keep not only the Law as given to Moses, but also the 500 plus rules of life provided in the rabbinical law. **Binding** meant literally "tying" people to the law, keeping them safe by making sure they could not break it without immediate penalty. **Loosing** was about the promise that Israel would be a blessing to all nations...loosing was sharing their Law and faith with strangers and aliens and inquiring gentiles. **In our time, binding is meant to be healing, bandaging, holding someone together**

**til help comes... and loosing is sharing the Gospel of Christ** so that men and women can be set free from guilt and shame and the power of sin in their lives through faith and commitment to Jesus Christ. And God, in His Wisdom, has decided that the Church is to be the agent of those things. The Church is to be the visible reality of the power of God on earth to find up and set free. er.

St. Augustine once taught his students this: “Do not seek to understand in order to believe...understanding is God’s gift that follows upon belief”. And ‘We do not say the Creed because we understand and believe it all, we say the Creed in order that we may believe’.

We leave Peter now until next Sunday where we will find that blessedly happy Peter immediately makes quite a botch of his insight and commitment. We will learn a great deal more about him and ourselves and the amazing grace of Jesus, who is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the son of the Living God. Read ahead and think and pray and come expecting God to give you insight. Amen.

### **Prayer for this Day:**

Almighty God, you are greatly to be praised. You sent us the patriarchs to teach and guide us, the People of Israel to show forth your faithfulness, Jesus your Son to give Himself for us, to fulfil the promise of the coming Anointed One, the Christ, the Saviour who lived and died to take away the sins of the whole world...the sins of us. May we, like Peter, be bold to pronounce your Identity. May we, like Paul, never be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. To God be the glory, now and forever, Amen.

May the peace of God which passes all our understanding, keep your hearts and minds filled with the love of God and of His Son Jesus Christ, and the blessing of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you always!

Judie+

