

## *SERMON ~ BIBLE READING MARK 8:27-30*

Over the centuries, Jesus has been depicted and defined in many different ways. These ‘pictures have often reflected our own human agendas, whether political, spiritual or secular. We see this in contemporary culture, where Jesus is merely respected as a ‘great spiritual teacher or leader’ like all the others, one among many on the shelves of the supermarket of faith.

When Jesus Christ asks his disciples: “Who are people saying that I am?”, he gets a variety of replies from them – ‘John the Baptist’ or ‘Elijah’ or ‘one of the prophets’, those fearless men of God who spoke out against evil and injustice and brought hope to God’s puzzled and suffering people – a new version of someone who had already been around. And by the way, if that is how Jesus’ contemporaries saw him, it certainly dispels the ‘gentle Jesus, meek and mild’ image, for there was absolutely nothing gentle or mild about the prophets or Elijah or John the Baptist.

Jesus then asks the disciples a different question: ‘Forget everyone else. What about you? Who do you say I am?’ Ultimately, this is the only question that matters. And in that moment their eyes are opened and they understand about the loaves and all the other signs. Then speaking up and speaking for them all Peter gives the answer: “You are the Messiah.”

And how politically dangerous and theologically risky these four words are. For here isn’t some claim about the divinity of Jesus or the second person of the Trinity – no, here is the claim that Jesus is the true King of Israel, the final heir to the throne of David, the one before whom Herod Antipas and all the other would-be Jewish princelings are just shabby little impostors, the king who will challenge Rome itself, the king they are longing for – and they think they’ve found him.

But how incomplete Peter’s reply is. For Jesus is giving the dream of a Messiah a complete face-lift; for Jesus has in mind a radically new way of being God’s appointed and anointed king; for Jesus radically redefines the tasks the Messiah will do and spells out a strange and radically new agenda. So Peter’s reply barely scratches the surface of who Jesus really is – but then the total truth about Jesus is well beyond human understanding and reasoning. But Jesus accepts what Peter has grasped so far.

So, what about us? Who do we say Jesus is? As we think about how to answer that question, we shouldn’t just rehash what others have said

– what do we say? We shouldn't just think about what we've read about Jesus – we should ask ourselves what our inner conviction about Jesus is. So would we like to think of him as simply a great human teacher? Or would we prefer him as a Superman figure, able to 'zap' all the world's problems into shape? Or are we ready to have the easy answers of our culture challenged by the actual Jesus, by his redefined idea of messiahship and by his call to follow him?

### *FOOD FOR THOUGHT*

In our Western culture, we put a high value on being 'right' all the time. Three quotations from Oscar Wilde challenge this:

'I am not young enough to know everything.'

'Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative.'

'Whenever people agree with me I always feel I must be wrong.'

### *GOING DEEPER*

Questions on the Bible passage, Mark 8:27-30, and on the sermon for you to think about, either on your own or in a small group:

1. Why do you think Jesus asked his disciples this particular question at this point in his ministry?
2. Why do you think Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone else what Peter had just said about him?
3. Think of the people with whom you wish to share your faith. Do you simply want them to know Jesus in the way that you know him, or are you helping them to establish their own relationship with him?