**Sermon: Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost 5 Sept 2021**

**Is 50:499a, Ps 116:1-9, James 2:18-26, , Mark 8.27-38**

Jesus asked the disciples, ‘Who do people say that I am’. The popular SBS program *Who do you think you are?* Looks at well-known Australian personalities and they dive into looking at their heritage, discovering along the way something they did not know about their history, and indeed about themselves. Some of the personalities this season included Malcom Turnbull, Celia Pacquola, Uncle Jack Charles and many others. It’s an intriguing look into the backgrounds of these famous Australians. Jesus wanted the disciples to answer who they thought Jesus was to them.

There are many answers I could give to that question but you and I have the benefit of the canon of scripture before us. This was not so for the disciples. Indeed, many of them were still trying to piece together for themselves who Jesus was to them. The answers they provide tell us something about what they knew from their reading of the Hebrew scriptures, our Old Testament. John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. Jesus then pursues this line of questioning further asking specifically, ‘who do *you* think that I am? It is one thing to define what other people may or may not think, it is a completely different matter when we are asked personally. Peter answers Jesus, as recorded in Marks gospel, ‘You are the Messiah’.

Peter recognises in Jesus his true identity. Peter understands that Jesus is more than just one of the prophets or Elijah or John the Baptist returned. Jesus is to Peter the promised Messiah come to Israel. That is a huge claim. The Israelite people had been waiting for centuries for the coming of Messiah. This word Messiah in Hebrew and in Judaism was to be someone who would be a Jewish leader, descendant of the paternal Davidic line either through King David or King Solomon. They expected that Messiah would come and unite the twelve tribes of Israel, to gather the people of Israel together and to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

However, what we encounter with Jesus breaks with the tradition of Judaism’s expectations of Messiah. Instead, and it is made plain in our gospel reading today what kind of Messiah Jesus would be. Jesus began to teach his disciples about what he would undergo, that he would suffer, be rejected by the Chief Priests and the scribes, and be killed. Finally, after all for this Jesus said he would rise from the dead in three days. None of this sounded to the disciples the kind of Messiah they were expecting. Remembering that Jesus disciples were Jewish. These words from Jesus about suffering and dying would have come as a shock. And we know this to be true because Peter takes Jesus aside and berates him. In Mark’s gospel we don’t get a sense of what Peter may have said, but in Matthew’s gospel in chapter 16, we get a very different picture. Peter’s comments in Peter, “God forbid it Lord, This must never happen to you” (Matt 16:22).

Peter had declared to Jesus that he is the Messiah the promised one to come to the people of Israel and then following in quick succession chastises Jesus for saying he must suffer and be killed. Human beings can be quite fickle, believing in one instance then denying in the next. Peter sets for us an example of what humanity looks like under pressure. Say it is not so. Please anything but this. I wonder how we have reacted at the news of each lockdown, no, please, no, let it not be. Anything but this. Followed by the joy of being together once more with each relaxation of the restrictions. Peter is caught up in his own desires, in his plans for Jesus. Peter knows in whom he believes but would prefer a Messiah that fits his model and his idea.

Do we put God in a box? God you can do this but not that. You can be with me in these matters but not those ones. Who is Jesus to you? Who do you say Jesus is? As we draw closer to the end of the church year, consider who Jesus is to you. Consider who it is that we worship. Consider where God is in your life. Do we want God to be our all in all, or just to be with us in the easy things. Where is God for you when the going gets tough? Where do you draw strength from.

The psalmist wrote in Psalm 27:

‘The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear,

The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid. (v. 1)

And continues from verse 4:

One thing have I desired of the Lord

That will I seek after

That I may dwell in the house of the Lord

All the days of my life

And to inquire in his temple.

And finally verse 5:

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble

He will conceal me under the cover of his tent, he will set me high on a rock.

The imagery of God as our light, the stronghold of our life, as the one who will hide us, shelter us in the day of trouble. This is the God we worship. Jesus relationship with the Father is close, they are one in every sense.

Who is this God, this Jesus that we worship to you. Particularly in this time of lockdown, find some time to meditate on who God is to you. Spend some time in prayer, a time of thanksgiving, in adoration and worship and praise. Jesus is our redeemer, our Messiah, the Christ. The one who came to redeem the world. Let us give thanks that Jesus was not afraid of his what was to happen but would fulfill the will of God in order that you and I could come into relationship with God.