

Eleventh Sunday After Trinity



The disciples have seen and heard the words and works of Jesus that point to his divine authority, they have struggled, but now they believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Others may believe that Jesus is no more than a successor to John the Baptist or Elijah or a prophet from of old. But all these fall short of Jesus' true significance, for as Christ he is the Son of the living God.

The prophet Isaiah delivers a rich tapestry of Old Testament themes to the people of Israel living in exile as a small minority amongst the Babylonians. God's plan for his people began with two people, Abraham and Sarah, and what God has done in the past he can do again in the future.

*Listen to me, my people,
and give heed to me, my nation;
for a teaching will go out from me,
and my justice for a light to the peoples.*

*I will bring near my deliverance swiftly,
my salvation has gone out
and my arms will rule the peoples;
the coastlands wait for me,
and for my arm they hope.
Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment,
and those who live on it will die like gnats;*
but my salvation will be for ever,
and my deliverance will never be ended.*

Gospel: Matthew 16.13-20

The confession of Peter is a turning point in the Gospel story. The disciples have struggled with their fears and their faith but now, with Peter as spokesman, they turn conviction into explicit confession.

*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.*

Reflection

So who do you say that I am?

When Peter declares, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,' he confirms that Jesus is the key to God's relationship with the whole of God's creation. And on the basis of his confession, Simon (now Peter) is made the rock on whom the church is built. So this is our transforming characteristic: our personal knowledge of who Jesus Christ is, and with this knowledge, the gates of heaven are opened to us. This is what we are doing as we affirm our faith in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God whose kingdom will have no end. And we are also re-affirming our faith in the parent-hood of God and recognising one another as sister and brother. Pilgrims together on a journey, who weep together and laugh together, serving each other in the name of the one we know as the Messiah.

Discipleship is not a theory, it is real, hard, disturbing, faith in action - as we stand before God and look deeply into our own hearts and our own souls. And part of our calling as disciples of Christ is to demonstrate to the world at large that a diverse community, transformed by God rather than conformed to the world, can live together as sister and brother in a spirit of welcome, forgiveness and love.

Prayer

God of glory, the end of our searching,
help us to lay aside all that prevents us from seeking your kingdom,
and to give all that we have to gain the pearl beyond all price,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.