

**11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity 23<sup>rd</sup> August**

**Exodus 1:8-2:10; Psalm 124; Romans 12:1-8; Matt 16:13-20 Proper 16**

Words from the end of Psalm 19: **May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to You, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.**

Jesus asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the son of man is?' In Jesus' day, 'son of man' was a title which meant 'mortal' or 'human being'. 'Who do people say this mortal is? Jesus was asking. The disciples replied by painting a picture of the mortal Jesus as a Leader... of the crowds who followed him and listened intently as he questioned their leaders; as a Teacher, going up the Mountain to give his 'sermon', concluding, 'I have come to fulfil the law not abolish it'; as a Healer, curing many dis-eases, giving people new life and as a Prophet, proclaiming God's justice, truth and mercy, calling listeners to true worship through turning to face God.

You begin to see the complexity of Jesus' simple question. After their replies, Jesus asks another simple question, 'WHO do YOU say I am?' If this was a film, it would be the point where all action was suspended and the wait time would grow longer until the audience melted with anticipation. It's a 'Strictly' or 'Britain's Got Talent' l o n g wait moment and, with added shock...horror... as it's a question directed to us this morning as well as to the disciples back then. What will we say?

Before you consider an answer, hear this cultural tale...*One evening an old Cherokee Indian told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, "My son, the battle is between two "wolves" inside us all. One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?" L O N G wait while you melt with anticipation.... The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."*

The one you feed...ummm. We could continue thinking that Jesus was a Leader, Teacher, Healer and Prophet or we could begin to feed on the idea that Jesus was truly God's Son [that's the Spoiler, by the way!]. We can choose to remain as we are, with our doubts and confusions our fears, accusations and judgements or we can choose to renew our minds, assess and use our gifts,

rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer, contribute to the needs of the saints and extend hospitality to strangers.

Everything, up until this moment in Matthew's Gospel, points towards the answer Simon was about to give Jesus...and everything from this moment on led to the cross, death and resurrection as proof of what Peter was about to say. Did you notice I changed his name? This is what Jesus does to charge the already crackling atmosphere with electricity. 'You were Simon but now you are the Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church.' The 'church' [in Greek, 'ekklesia'] Jesus speaks of is not a building and is not made of rock; it will, after the resurrection, become a small congregation of forgiven sinners; the shakiest, but somehow surest, foundation in all of God's Creation. That was why Jesus said Peter's revelation came from his 'Father in Heaven' and had to remain a strict secret; it would not make any sense at all until after the cross and resurrection.

A small congregation of forgiven sinners? What does this mean? The words from Romans read like the blurb on a book cover with the strapline: 'This is what the Gospel means so read it twice or thrice, then go live it!' The words encourage us in understanding how to live as God's children, as a small congregation of forgiven sinners. You **will** know true worship of God as your minds are renewed; you **will** become clearer about your gifts and how to use them for the common good, you **will** become part of one body, which needs all its members to work from, and with, God's Grace and Love alone.

So, which side are you feeding? Your fears, frustrations and confusions or your Faith, Hope and Love? Both readings invite us to know **who** Jesus is so we can live as children of God and forgiven sinners. This is what a passport to God's heaven would have written on the first page, under our photograph: child of God /forgiven sinner. We can choose to desire God, to know God's will for us, to renew our minds and hone our gifts, or not. WHO do YOU say Jesus is? L o n g wait time as I melt with anticipation... so, let's pray instead...

*O God, maker of heaven and earth, you save us in the water of baptism and, by the suffering of your Son, you set us free; help us to put our trust in his victory and to know the salvation won for us by Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*