

Collect, Readings and Sermon
Sunday 23rd August 2026
The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,
you are always more ready to hear than we to pray
and to give more than either we desire or deserve:
pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy,
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid
and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask
but through the merits and mediation
of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Isaiah 51:1-6

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. For the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. 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.

Psalms 138

The response to the Psalm is:
Great is the glory of the Lord.

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Matthew 16:13-20

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.

Post Communion

God of compassion,
in this eucharist you have set aside our sins
and given us your healing:
grant that we who are made whole in Christ
may bring that healing to this broken world,
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sermon

When I am preparing people for confirmation I have two activities that I especially enjoy. The first uses images of Jesus in a pack called “The Christ we Share”. There are around 20-30 pictures of Jesus from a range of different cultures. Some would be immediately recognisable to you, such as an image of Jesus as a white man, wearing a long white robe tied at the waist, with longish blond hair, in a woodland clearing. Others you might find more surprising, for example, images of Jesus in agony on the cross, or as a woman, and many identifying a different ethnicity. People’s reactions to the images can be so interesting in helping them to begin to think about who Jesus is for them.

The second activity is about discussing how Jesus might be described – for example, as a teacher, a healer, a leader; and then as Son of God, or Son of Man, the Messiah. I’m sure you can think of many other possibilities. The discussion around this question begins to get to grips with which aspects of the Jesus that we come to know within the scriptures – and then in our prayer lives – are the most significant to us. Is it sufficient, for example, for us to see Jesus as a good man and a teacher. Or is there more to who he is?

The reason that these discussions are so important in preparation for confirmation – and, I believe, beyond – is that we all have different perspectives to share. While part of the importance of preparation for confirmation is learning something about the doctrine of the church, our faith lives are much more personal than that. In the end, what matters more is our own relationship with God. When we are brave enough to share this with others, everyone is enriched, because each one of us has a different perspective. In truth, God is so much bigger than anything that any one of us can grasp, and therefore by hearing the perspectives of others, we begin to see more than we would on our own.

In this morning’s gospel reading, Jesus asks the disciples directly: “Who do you say that I am?” It’s probably worth having a bit of context. You may notice that sometimes sections of the Bible get missed out in our readings, and this morning is no exception. At the beginning of chapter 16, Jesus finds himself being tested by the Sadducees and Pharisees. They ask him for a sign to prove who he is and that what he says and does comes from God. You will

know that both Sadducees and Pharisees were important religious leaders of the time, so they will have been listened to. And yet Jesus not only refuses to offer any kind of sign, but then cautions the disciples about their teaching.

In some ways I have some sympathy with the Sadducees and Pharisees. Throughout our Christian lives, we seek to understand God's call on our lives. Perhaps many of us have, at some time or another, wished for a sign to show us categorically that we are on the right path. And yet, as Jesus knows, their motivation is not to understand God's will, but to test Jesus. So he refuses to be part of their experiment.

It is after he has warned the disciples, that Jesus asks them first who other people say that he is, and then: "Who do you say that I am?" I wonder how each of the disciples felt at that moment. We know how Peter responded. But what of the others? Did they have a ready answer? Might it have been something along the lines of the roles that I have discussed with confirmation candidates – that he was a teacher; a preacher; Son of God; Son of Man. And I wonder, too, how they felt about the question. Did they feel uncomfortable? On the spot, perhaps? Was it something that they were expecting, or did it come out of the blue? They had, of course, already been prepared because Jesus first asked who others said that he was. But there's something so very different, isn't there, about speaking for others than speaking for ourselves.

Peter's is the response that we hear. He immediately identifies Jesus as the Messiah. It is one of those moments of enlightenment that can suddenly flash before us through Peter. He was a man of great insight – as well as having numerous "foot in mouth" moments. On this occasion, though, the inspiration is clear. And Jesus's response recognises its significance.

And what about us? How would we respond to Jesus's question? At the heart of our Christian faith is the person of Jesus. It strikes me that being able to answer who we would say that he is is rather fundamental. I wonder how you would begin.

There are, of course, so many possibilities about how we might begin. For example, we might start by thinking about his biographical details. He is the son of Mary and Joseph, born

in Bethlehem and brought up in Nazareth. Perhaps if we were asked the question around Christmastime, we might start there. Or maybe it's his ministry that is more significant. He was baptised by John as an adult and then spent time in the wilderness before beginning his public ministry. Would we identify these things if we were asked who he is?

Later in this service we will affirm our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed. This gives us quite a fulsome description of who Jesus is: Son of God; begotten of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God; begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. It goes on to describe aspects of his life, death and resurrection. Are these the things that you would identify, if asked who you say that Jesus is?

Perhaps, though, we might think just a little bit differently. If someone very close to you asked "who do you say that I am", I'm sure that to begin with you would be perplexed. But it wouldn't take long before you could start to answer. "You're Wendy, one of my closest friends, who has been there at the most important times in my life. You're the one I call first when I have something to celebrate, or am about to burst into tears." Or: "You're John, my soul mate, the person I want to see first thing in the morning and last thing at night; the one who can drive me mad because you never put anything away, but who can light up my life in an instant."

If this is the kind of thing that we can say about the people closest to us, I wonder whether it can help us, too, when thinking about who we might say that Jesus is. "You're the one who I know is present even when I feel completely on my own. You're the one who loves me unconditionally, even when I find it hard to love myself. You're the one who knows my darkest secrets – and has never gone away." Or maybe something a bit different: "You're the one that I cry out to when I am most desperate; the one that I wish would give me a clear answer, but often doesn't. You're the one that I can feel so close to one minute, and so far away from the next." Or even: "You're the one that I believe is there but find it hard to get close to."

The New Testament reading for this morning, from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, reminds us that we are all part of the same body, but with different skills. This means that we really

are better together. And if we're better together, we will also be better seeking to get to know God together, since we will each have different ways of knowing who God is. When Jesus asks his disciples "who do you say that I am", it seems to me that he is asking us the same question. Perhaps it's worth taking a little time this week to think about how we might answer that question. It may be that it has changed a great deal over the years – and maybe you can recognise those changes. If we're ever brave enough to share some of those emerging thoughts with one another, we really will grow closer to God.

Amen