

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individuals or families
Sunday 23rd August 2020 at 10:30 am.

12th Sunday after Pentecost

Call to Worship

We come to you in worship, people from different places and backgrounds, and each with a different temperament. Yet we are called to possess the mind of Christ; we are called to answer the question; “Who do people say I am?” and be co-workers in the kingdom. Come let us worship... the Messiah.

Hymn

In Christ alone my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground. Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace. When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all. Here in the love of Christ I stand

Prayers of Approach and Thanksgiving

Lord Jesus, you are the rock of our joy, and we praise you. You are the key to our healing, and we worship you. You are the rock on which we build our future, and we trust you. As we move through this time of uncertainty, we hold on to you as our rock. Come into our hearts

Let us give thanks to God, with our whole heart. Let us offer thanks for God’s steadfast love and faithfulness to us.

Our God, your glory shines forth from the highest heaven, and yet you have compassion on the least of all of us.

We confess that: we have not always taken care of each other, respectfully as we ought; we have not always taken the path that is right and have so often wandered in the opposite direction. We have not always been motivated by love and goodness. Forgive us and transform us, Lord that we will be better equipped to share the Good news of who you are in our community.

God, the giver of life, we offer our lives back to you.

Forgive us, change us and renew us.

In the name of Christ, we bring all our prayers together, in the prayer Jesus, the Messiah, taught his disciples **Our Father**



Readings

Isaiah 51: 1-6

Look to the rock from which you were cut...

Matthew 16: 13-20

Peter is the rock on which Christ’s Church will be built...

Romans 12: 1-8

So let us present ourselves, and our gifts, to His service - and find out His will...

Meditation – Who am I? - by Hedley Siddall

The pace of the journey was always hard.

There were constant demands on him from both outside and inside the group. He pushed on. Then we found we had climbed to the top of the mountain. It was in places like this that he often chose to be alone. On other occasions it was a major expedition, getting us all up there and back.

We were all still getting our breath when he started: ‘Who do people say I am?’ he asked. Some thought it was a trick question and stated the obvious: ‘You’re Jesus, from Nazareth,’ said one, laughing. He went round the group, getting more insistent. ‘Who do people say I am?’ He came to me, ‘why do you ask us?’ I said.

He licked his cracked lips, and said in a barely audible voice, ‘I don’t know who I am anymore.’

The members of the group looked at each other in silence. Eventually one said, ‘I heard someone say you’re John the Baptist. That triggered them all off. ‘Well that’s rubbish – he’s already dead.’ Another said, ‘Well, I’ve heard Elijah’, and another said ‘Yea, and Jeremiah.’ They were trying to help I know, but it was not what he needed right then.

The babble trailed off into silence again. Then he looked at Peter and asked him: ‘who do you say I am?’ I wondered what Peter would say. ‘That’s easy,’ he said, looking him straight in the face. ‘You’re the one we’ve been waiting for, the Life giver. God is in you and because of you we have seen God.’

This time no one broke the silence which followed, until he said, ‘Thanks, Peter, you’re a rock to me. I will build on what you’ve said. It is the key to God’s plan and you will be the key holder. But let’s keep it amongst ourselves for now, shall we?’ We did as he asked.

Roots 2011

Matthew 16: 13-20 surely is the hinge on which the whole of the Gospel turns – Jesus is educating his disciple by asking questions.

Jesus and the disciples are in Caesarea Philippi, near the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, in Gentile territory. Tom Wright says about this account: ‘Human searching and divine response meet together here.’

First Jesus wants to know what people are saying about him; then he asks the crucial question, ‘But who do **you** say I am?’ And Peter for once has got it right. ‘You are the Messiah, the son of the living God.’

The Hebrew word Messiah – With its Greek equivalent Christ – originally means someone anointed by God. In the Bible it usually means a rescuer set by God. In the Old Testament, there were hints of one who would come, but in the bitter days of Israel’s occupation, first by the Greeks and then by the Romans, the cry for a deliver became more desperate and insistent.

Occasionally the Messiah was seen as a spiritual saviour, but in Jesus’ time he was a ‘son of David who would win military victories and expel the Romans.

Jesus began his ministry in an atmosphere of intense messianic expectation, and he displayed many messianic qualities. He healed the sick, the lame, the deaf the dumb and the blind.

Yet did Jesus dislike people calling him ‘Messiah’? Perhaps because it was too tied up with the ideas of violence, military might and nationalism. He linked the term with suffering in an attempt to correct these misconceptions.

Simon was an impulsive character and like me on occasions opened his mouth when he should have kept it shut, but here he was beginning to recognise what Christ's mission was all about, and as Peter the rock, what his vocation in life was to be. The rock of the Church still denied Jesus three times before finding the courage to witness at Pentecost.

A fortnight ago Simon Copley talked about football stars who were prepared to declare their Christian faith and no matter what the difficulties. We as Christians are called to witness our faith. Rather like members of parliament are required to work for all constituents no matter what their political allegiance, so Christians must tell others of God's care and purpose for, and to, all people. As Paul says as Christians we 'are one body in Christ.'

Peter Walker says: 'It's good to ask lots of questions of Jesus – God welcomes such honest enquiry – but eventually the tables are turned and the spotlight falls on us. The Jesus who evidently knows the dark depths of the human heart turns to face us and invites us to get real – both about who he is and about who we are. How are we to respond?'

In this current crisis people are saying; 'Things will never be the same again. What is going to be the new normal?' After Peter's declaration is that what the disciples were thinking? Andrew McLellan in his book 'preaching for These People' says of Peter's declaration: 'You are the Messiah the Son of the living God'. It is the first time in the New Testament anything quite like that is said. There is no doubt that Matthew meant it to be a dramatic encounter, a turning point. A moment that changes things'

There is much disagreement about Jesus' response to Peter in that moment of encounter. You are Peter the Rock, and on this rock I will build my Church. For some it is Peter's faith which is the rock; for some it is Peter's authority.' But for many like me it is simply Peter himself, someone whose shortcomings we all can relate to. He is the first of countless believers in Christ and the founder of the community to which we all belong.

In our secularised society, the COVID crisis has prompted many people to inquire about what Christianity has to offer. Are we as Christians too afraid to speak?! One of the most difficult tasks we have to do is to tell none Christians, without alienating them, about how Jesus has shaped our lives.

Jesus told us to 'Go into the world and preach the gospel'. Being a Christian is not about having it easy, but often stepping out on a pathway of fear and pain.

We may find it easier to pursue mission by good deeds and works, but make no mistake we are all required to '**Go out and tell**'. If or when we get back to a new kind of normal are you prepared to tell others about Christ in a way that is relevant in the current situation? **Amen**

Spend a few moments in silence reflecting on being a disciple and being like Peter, chosen to be the Rock on which Jesus builds his Church

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we have heard your call as it has echoed down the generations, through history and tradition, through Scripture and preaching, through the lives and witness of faithful people. We have heard your call reaching out to us, as we have worshipped, as we have prayed, as we have wrestled with doubt and unbelief.

Hear us now, as we call out to you in praise and prayer, in honest confession, and as we intercede for the needs of the world. We pray for the oppressed people of the world, for the freedom and justice which they seek.

We confess that our world could be a much better place and that we could play our part in making it so. We do not challenge assumptions that injustice is inevitable and do not value the small things we can do to make a difference.

We pray for those who are caught up in war and conflicts ...

We pray for the victims of war, famine and disease

We pray for those who are persecuted for their faith or political belief....

We pray for the bereaved and those who face death ...we remember the people of Beirut and Belarus and those caught up in the train derailment in Scotland

These prayers we offer up for all named and those held in our silence, whose resurrection brings hope for all humanity. Help us to always be ready to serve you and remember that you are with us at all times.

Hear our prayers now, in Jesus' name. **Amen**

Hymn

Deep peace; of a running wave to you.

Deep peace; of the flowing air to you

Deep peace; of the quiet earth to you

Deep peace; of the shining stars to you

Deep peace; of the gentle night to you

Moon and stars; pour their healing light on you

Deep peace to you

Blessing

Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone he was the Messiah.

We leave this space now, hopefully with hearts so full of amazement and joy, that we can't help but share the good news.

Go with us, good Lord, and help us to tell everyone who will listen

May the blessing of God be with you always. Amen