

Sunday Update
23rd August 2020

Matthew 16:13-20

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" 14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

How would you describe Edinburgh? There is a debate going on in the pages of the newspapers and I suspect, on Twitter about the future of the city and some people are getting very worked up about it. For you, what is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about Edinburgh? Is it something to do with the weather? This week has not been a very good week for the East coast! Is it the festivals that describe the city for you, either because you love them or because you find them a nuisance? Is the city simply home for you because you have lived your life here, spent all your working life here, and it is simply the place you call home? We could talk about Edinburgh as the place where the Church of Scotland has its offices and where it meets each year in General Assembly – for some that is their only reason to visit Edinburgh!

While we might describe Edinburgh in church terms like these, we can hardly describe the city as a bastion of spirituality in Scotland in the 21st century. A few years ago, well before Covid and lockdown, a survey was done to find out about churchgoing in Scotland. The survey discovered that 2% of the Edinburgh population was in church on any Sunday. That is very small, but is representative of the whole of Scotland. A very small proportion of the population consider Christian faith important enough to them to attend a service of worship in a Church on any given Sunday. We can't describe Edinburgh as a Christian city, nor Scotland as a Christian country given these statistics. The critics of any kind of religious faith would rejoice and tell us that the people of Edinburgh are now more enlightened because they have thrown off the controlling fear of religion; we might feel the need to talk about the city as a pagan place!

I say all of this because I have reading this week about the place called Caesarea Philippi. This is the place at the centre of our Bible story this week. It was almost the most-northerly place that Jesus visited in His travels and by the time He got there it was a city built by Herod the great with a marble temple in honour of Augustus Caesar; Philip the tetrarch added more to the city and renamed it in honour of the emperor, adding his own name to it to distinguish it from another city called Caesarea on the coast. All over the city there were statues in honour of Caesar, inviting people to worship him and bring offerings. Before that, the city was called Paneas, in honour of the Greek god Pan, their half-man, half-goat god of fertility. The picture is of a



deep cave, which people believed was the entrance to the underworld, where the spirits would come and go, almost literally, the gates of hell! This is not a place where people would be hugely welcoming of them message about the kingdom of God.

It is while visiting this pagan place, dedicated to a Roman emperor who gladly saw himself as a god, that Jesus has a conversation with His disciples that becomes a turning-point for them in their relationship with Jesus. It starts with an almost routine question: *“who do people say the Son of Man is?”* (verse 13) *“What’s the gossip about me? What do people say about me?”* They give Him the answers that He probably expected: some were saying that He is John the Baptist come back to life again; others were talking about Him in the same breath as one of the prophets of old, Elijah or Jeremiah. It is a routine, comfortable conversation, non-threatening! But then Jesus asks a second question: *“But what about you? Who do you say that I am?”* (verse 15) This is an altogether different question; this is a challenging question, that puts the disciples on the spot. This is now about what they think and what they believe about Jesus; this question asks them to respond to what they have seen and heard of Jesus and what they say about Him for themselves.

In this pagan place and against the background of worship of the emperor and other gods, Peter makes the most sublime and profound reply. *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* (verse 16) Jesus is the Messiah, sent from God; more than that, Jesus is the very embodiment of God, described in the phrase *“Son of God”*. He is the spokesperson, the one who puts into words what all of the group might say. God has given them insight; they have watched Jesus, seeing His miracles; they have listened to Jesus, hearing Him teach. From what they have seen and heard, they have understood something and God has given Peter the words to express what they think and believe about Jesus. This declaration of faith will later lead them into conflict with all that the place represents, conflict with the Roman Empire and with paganism across the Mediterranean world, as Peter and the others bring the gospel of Jesus to the world in which they live.

Nailing your colours to the mast can be a painful and difficult thing to do. Being the only Christian in an office where nobody else shares your faith can be a lonely place to be, and can be hard when the ethos and the way people behave goes against the grain for you. Being the only person in your family who is part of a church can be hard for other reasons. For young people in school, it is far easier to be like everyone else than it is to examine Christian faith as a life-shaping option. Yet that is what Peter did when he answered Jesus’ question and that is the challenge that his experience puts before us. Are there times and places where we need to nail our Christian colours to the mast? Are there times and places where to declare our allegiance to Jesus is the right thing to do? We need to be wise and careful, but we also need to be courageous at times. Making vows of Church membership is perhaps the obvious way of making that allegiance public, but there might be other times and places, in friendships, in work-places, in leisure groups, when to stay silent is not the best option! Edinburgh needs a bold church, a church unashamed of our faith, a church ready to show and share our allegiance to Jesus.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for Jesus, the Messiah sent to save the world, the Son of the living God come to show us what God is like. Thank you that Jesus completed His mission as Messiah and that He was faithful to his calling. Thank you for Peter’s confession of faith, the foundation of our faith; w pray that You would give us the same courage to believe in Jesus and to declare our faith with courage, to the honour and praise of Jesus’ name.

*Day by day, dear Lord of you
Three things I pray:
To see you more clearly,
To love you more dearly,
To follow you more nearly,
Day by day.*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- Pray for our schools, having been back this week; for Head Teachers, management teams and teachers, to find the best way to meet the needs of our children and young people as much as possible; teachers' fears about the new term.
- Pray for the children, settling down into the routines and rhythms of being back at school; children going to school for the first time; young people moving to a new school.
- Young people having gone through the stress of their exam results and now considering what their future holds: are some back to school? Others looking for college or university places?
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.
- NHS staff, care home staff, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- The opening up of lockdown, to be done carefully and not recklessly; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable. Headline stories of breaches of the protocols to be seen for the danger that they are rather than people to copy them.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some still furloughed, others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- More places opening: let this not be the occasion for a spike in the virus, but for people to stay safe and well while enjoying new freedoms.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- The church to be bold and courageous in speaking of our faith and declaring that Jesus is Lord; mission agencies like the Scottish Bible Society, Scripture Union and Tearfund, all seeking in different ways to engage people in thinking about Christian faith and encouraging people to believe.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

Holy, holy, holy	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwuDSw-9cUQ
Give thanks to the Lord	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGTZq3uCPm0
Amazing Grace	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NG0vH4WYChQ&pbjreload=10
I have decided to follow Jesus	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54VrgIT2NLA
I the Lord of sea and sky	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Zr9SMm1gII

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerigpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of “**Every Day with Jesus**” Booklet for September and October 2020 are now available. Please contact Ian Aitken who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Michael Merriman. **Let the Bible feed you.**

Church Golf Outing: Malcolm Brown is trying to organise the Church Golf outing for August 28th. The golf is relatively straightforward, with the first tee time at 1.30pm on Friday 28th Aug. If you want to play, let Malcolm know. The prospect of a meal in the clubhouse is slightly more complicated and we have decided not to have the meal this year. If you want to play golf, however contact Malcolm; his e-mail address is malcolmsbrown@gmail.com

Church News: we are planning to produce an issue of Church News sometime in the next few weeks. Alison is keen to include people’s stories of lockdown: did you learn to play the guitar or to speak Spanish? Contact Alison on jgchurchnews@gmail.com with your lockdown stories or anything else you would like to include in Church News.



Juniper Green
Parish Church

A better story

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Father God,
as we come together here today,
build us together as your Church,
one family, together in this place.
Amen.



Question...



What words would you use to describe God?
What words do you think God uses to describe you?

Play together...

Play a game of "Who am I?" Prepare sticky notes with the names of famous people or characters on, one name on each. Without letting the person see, stick one on their forehead or back. They are then allowed to ask "yes" or "no" questions to the rest of the group to help them figure out who they are.

Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in Matthew 16:13-20. You can read them in a Bible or find them here:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16%3A13-20&version=GNT>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.



Talk together...



- What is the most important part of the story that we hear about Jesus today?
- How would you respond if Jesus asked you “Who do you think I am?”
- What kind of things or people do we put our trust in? How important is it to you to be able to trust those things?
- Do you trust in Jesus? Do you think we should? Why/why not?
- Do you know what your name means? (If not you can look it up!) Do you think it matches who you are? Jesus has lots of names that people use to describe him, can you think of any?
- Why do you think there are so many names for Jesus? Do they help us or hinder us in our understanding of who Jesus is?
- Peter’s name means “rock”. Jesus changed Peter’s name from Simon (which means the listener) to Peter, how do you think Peter felt about this and what it meant?

Praise together...



I’m trusting you
(DCCDiscipleland)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tV_LAP4owrY

Pray together...

Build and remember that Jesus is the rock we can build our lives on

You will need: rocks, felt tip pens.

Ask everyone to choose a rock, and to think of someone or something they would like to pray for.

Invite them to write those prayers on their rock and pile them up, one at a time, to make a prayer cairn.

When everyone has finished, say a prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the opportunity to build this cairn today, to bring all of our individual prayers and concerns together. Please bless each one and help us to remember that you are the solid rock we can build our lives on. **Amen.**

Create together...

Word art: Create a word art cloud of all the names or words you can think of that describe Jesus. Make it colourful, make some words bigger or smaller, circle any that stand out to you most. Here’s an example:



Do something silly together...

Play the name game! If you’ve never done this then have a look at this video to see what it’s all about then try it with your own names and any others you can think of!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7NEYSKRJzA&feature=youtu.be>