

## Bennochy church: 5th March 2017

If you have been at the receiving end of a difficult question, you will know exactly how the disciples of Jesus might have felt. The question you knew would come up at the job interview or exam, but you still struggled to know what the right answer was.

What answer they were they looking for. That question asked by a grandchild, and you do not know what the answer is, and till you can get to "Google", you say, go and ask your mum or dad. You are expected to know, because you are a grown up. As a minster, you watch *Pointless* or any other quiz program, and you are expected to get the religious questions right. After all, as a grown up, you are the expert.

Rumours would have be swirling all over the place. Rumours following Jesus around. Who is this guy? people flock to hear him speak. He teaches with authority. Has some great wee stories. He does some usual things. Walks on water, heals people and somehow manages to feed thousands of people with not an awful lot. No wonder people are wanting to know who he is. Added to that, this is a time of high expectation. Was God about to act and save his people. Never mind 'Brexit', or Donald Trump or Claudio Ranieri being sacked as manger of Leicester City. The rumour mill was working over time. It was all about God and somehow, this man Jesus has something to do with him..

Jesus did not travel alone. He had some very close friends who journeyed with him. A crazy bunch of fishermen, zealots and tax collectors. Surely they would know who he was. I think that is a reasonable assumption to make. These guys had walked the road with Jesus, over hundreds of miles. Surely in their conversations, Jesus would have told them who he was. We must also assume that they would have been as interested as anyone else in discovering for themselves, who Jesus was. They must have talked about it amongst themselves. Had they asked Jesus outright? We will never know.

The ultimate job interview takes place near the town of Caesarea Philippi, were Jesus asks two question. The first is easy, "*Who do people say the Son of man is?*" This is about what other people are saying. It is about the rumours that are flying around about him. Never mind the funny religious language of the question. This is all about Jesus and who he is. He is asking them, tell me the comments you have heard about me. Tell me the gossip. What have you heard in people's homes. In the pubs and the synagogues.

One says, 'Jesus, I have heard you are John the Baptist.' Someone else says Elijah. From the back someone else shouts out, 'No, Jeremiah.' There is some significance in these names, but this morning, lets not dwell on who these people are. 12 disciples were given 100 seconds to answer the question, "*Who*

*do people say the Son of Man is?"* Are there any pointless answers on the board?

Then the whole dynamic changes, and suddenly the spotlight turns on them. It is not longer *Pointless* it is now *Mastermind*. Your specialised subject is *"What about you, who do you say Jesus is?"*. Try to imagine what is going on here. Get yourself into the heads of the disciples. Is there an embarrassed silence before Peter speaks? Is it like looking for a volunteer, and all of a sudden the floor becomes very interesting? No eye contact? Do they say to Jesus, 'Can we phone a friend, ask the audience or can we go 50:50?' Is Simon Peter's response a personal one or has there been a group discussion? 'We don't know. we are not sure. Simon, you better answer. After all you were the one who got out the boat and tried to walk on water.' I can just imagine them all turning and looking at Simon Peter, for an answer. The question is deflected.

He was bold. He was brash and he got it right. *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."* The Messiah was the promised one of God who would come and save his people. The rumours and the man are coming together. I wonder if Jesus was thinking, 'It was not all in vain after all!' Someone's got it. Someone was listening. Here is a man on the same wave length and open to the voice of God.

Faith, belief in God, is never about what other people think. It is not about rumours. It is not about hearsay. It is not about someone else answering the question on our behalf.

Faith and belief in God, is not even about what we learn from others *about* God. That answers a different question. The question, 'What about you', means we are sitting in that black leather chair and we cannot turn to someone else and ask, what do you think? This question, demands a personal response. In this story, it is the personal response of Simon Peter. I like to think, he speaks on behalf of the others. Maybe he did.

Of all the challenging questions Jesus asked, this is the one that literally gets to the heart of the matter. Faith is not about someone else, it is ultimately about us and God. Amen.