

Sun 16th September – Proper 19 Year B

Sixteenth after Trinity

‘Who do people say that I am?’ Jesus asks his disciples as they journey to Caesarea Philippi.

One of the moments when I wish, like Harry Potter, that I could put on the invisibility cloak and become, invisible, is when on arriving to officiate at a funeral, or when I used to visit the Cobham Centre, I overhear someone mention my name.

Whereupon someone else, will then usually go on to tell those present how they knew my mother and father, and have known me since the year dot.

And what follows, I usually prefer not to overhear.

‘Whom do people say that I am?’

There was in those early post Second World War years, here in Cobham, a time when those living on the quickly growing two large Council Estates, would seldom if ever, engage with those living in the larger detached houses surrounding them. Other than that is than

to provide some sort of labour. My mother was such a person. The person she worked for would often interrupt my mother's working morning to say 'come and have a cup of coffee'. Mum would say that she still had much work to do, but the lady insisted saying to her that it could all wait – 'I want to have a chat'. For some people in those post 2nd World War days, living in the more exclusive parts of Cobham, life could be quite lonely, cut off – and it was probably workers from the new estates who knew quite a bit of what was going on in Cobham and the surrounding area at that time. Meeting with others from a different social group sometimes made all the difference.

Jesus of course was often criticised for engaging with those of a different class or tradition.

We can perhaps recall the remarks of Nathaniel, who when invited to come and meet Jesus by Andrew, and knowing something about the place where Jesus came from, responded with the words – 'can anything good come out of Nazareth?'

There was also a sense of people saying, even here in Cobham in relation to a group of properties known as the ‘Gun site’, – ‘Can anything good come out of the Gun-site?’ For fenced off with a metal gate, the Gun-Site comprised a collection of temporary huts. They were situated at the end of what is now Lockhart Road, up on the Tartar, behind Canada Road, and left over from the occupancy of the Canadian Troops who were billeted there and who manned the Ack Ack Guns – part of the forces protecting London from the German rockets.

They were the temporary homes of the displaced families from surrounding areas here in Surrey, awaiting permanent housing, the people no one wanted, the non-persons, the ‘Nazareth of Cobham’, in biblical terms.

‘Who do people say that I am?’

Often when a member of the clergy team moves on to another appointment, whether that has been as the incumbent, priest in charge or assistant priest they

often comment on the various relationships made during their ministry in the years they have spent in the parish.

For each of the various groups and individuals with whom they have come into contact with, during the years spent with us, and in answer to that first question that Jesus posed to his disciples, **‘Who do people say that I am?’** there would be from each one of us, a variety of responses based on our relationship to that person.

For at one end of the scale, so to speak, there will be a response emphasising a deep sense of loss, as that relationship with the priest may have involved a very personal and close friendship, built up on a very regular basis over the years.

For the reality of our relationship with others, will always be different, for no relationship between two persons can be exactly the same, even with our encounters and relationship with Jesus who continues to ask the question of us –

‘Who do people say that I am?’

Those appointed to a parish in whatever capacity and licensed by one of the Bishops of the Diocese, especially ‘new’ incumbents, are given the ‘pastoral care or ‘cure’, of the parish.’

For those appointed as Vicar or Rector of a Parish, specifically have the care or cure of all the souls of that parish, as noted in the preface to the order of service for the Institution and Induction of a priest to a Parish. As the document of institution to a parish, is given by the Bishop of Guildford or the person appointed by him to do so on his behalf says -

‘Receive the care of God’s people which is both yours and mine.’ Officially, other clergy in a parish have no ‘responsibility’, for the care or cure of the souls of that Parish, although in practise I believe that, that responsibility applies to all members of a church community, both ordained and lay.

It is however good from time to time to remind ourselves of what it is that a person appointed to lead

a congregation promises within the Church of England, especially as Mike begins his ministry among us.

First it is to be a true Pastor to all the people of that community in which the church building exists.

Secondly to do all that lies within their power to build up the Church, which is the 'Body of Christ'.

Thirdly to be a faithful minister of the Word and Sacraments, and to celebrate with devotion the Holy Communion and other services, and to proclaim God's Word with joy and fidelity.

The Bishop also reminds us for our part, as the members of the congregation, that we also are expected to share with the priest in the ministry of the Church. 'It is right,' the Bishop says, 'that we should all renew our resolve to be faithful servants of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Tomorrow the wider church remembers **Hildegard, Abbess of Bingen**, a Visionary, who died on the 17th

September in 1179. She wrote in her 'Book of Life's merits' the following.

'Forgetting about God leads to harmful and idle chatter such as: 'How can we know about God if we have never seen him? And why should we have any regard for him if I have never set eyes on him? People who talk like that are no longer mindful of their creator, and their minds are in the darkness of unbelief. They should allow God to return to the centre of their lives, recognising that they owe their very existence to no one else save God alone, who is the creator of all.'

When Thomas expressed his doubts concerning Jesus' resurrection, he received the response from Jesus – 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' We are part, of that company who have not seen our Lord, physically, but who through faith have come to accept him as Lord of our lives. Jesus today through our readings asks his disciples the question –

‘Who do people say that I am?’

But it is that second question which we need to be concerned about - **‘Who do you say that I am?’**

Oh yes, we are made well aware on occasions of the responses that are made to the first question of Jesus –

‘Who do people say that I am?’ But the question Jesus asks of you and me today, and especially at the beginning of this new chapter in the life of St.

Andrew’s, who let us remind ourselves is the Patron Saint of missionary’s is – **‘Who do you, say that I am?’** And unlike the disciples, we are not called to remain silent. We are called to speak out and proclaim Jesus Christ to the people of Cobham and to that part of the world in which we live out, our daily lives.

But, James also reminds us in our New Testament reading, as does Hildegard of Bingen, of the damage that our tongue can cause – ‘A restless evil, full of deadly poison.’

Perhaps we can recall moments when we ourselves have been verbally abused by others. But we also need to recall those moments when we ourselves may have been guilty, of verbally abusing others.

We need to learn to ‘bridle’ our own tongues on occasions, for in so doing we will then be able to control our whole bodies, offering them in the words of one of the prayers of the HC 1662 service in the book of Common Prayer as a –

‘Reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice.’

So today, let us all dedicate ourselves again to the service of our Lord. Aware that the path we, have chosen to tread, will not always be easy. But let us also remind ourselves that in gaining the whole world – we might indeed forfeit our own lives, if by our own actions, that should separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That same Jesus who once again today asks us, his disciples here on earth – **‘Who do you say that I am?’**

Let me close with a prayer used just before the institution of a new priest by the Bishop -

'Lord you have given us minds to know you, hearts to love you, and voices to praise your name.

Give us grace to offer ourselves freely in your service, that we may faithfully fulfil the worship of your church, glorify you in our lives and set forward the cause of your Kingdom. AMEN'

Peter Vickers

Sunday Proper 19 Year B - Trinity 16

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