

Sunday August 23rd

Matthew 16: 13-20

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

A few weeks ago, I had the wonderful privilege of seeing 2 of my children getting married within a week of each other. They were lockdown weddings and had to be arranged at short notice. There was no time for their banns of marriage to be called and so they both needed to obtain a common licence. For this they needed to go to a surrogate, to take their passports with them so that their identities could be checked. They then had to swear an oath that they were indeed who they said that they were. Happily, they both went without a hitch.

1 In our gospel reading today, we hear how Jesus wants to check out his identity with others. He begins by asking two questions, the first one to his disciples 'who do people say that I am'? Based on what they have seen and heard, what are they saying? The disciples reply, 'well some say you are John the Baptist, others that you are Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets'.

Then Jesus says he is not so much interested in what others say, I am more interested in: who do you say that I am? Quick as a flash, Peter says: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'.

Jesus then tells Peter that from now on, he was going to build his church on this declaration. When we acknowledge who Jesus really is and decide to turn to Christ and follow Him, we become a disciple, we enter the kingdom of God, we become part of the body of Christ.

Church for Jesus is not a physical building or an organisation or a denomination or that it is limited by geography or culture or history. Church for Jesus is simply wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in his name. So whilst there may be a number of buildings to which people go to on a Sunday or specific Zoom services that they attend, the umbrella term for this is church and she gathers in every local community in our Diocese, our country and our world and we are members of it. What a privilege this is!

There is more. Jesus says that nothing will ever overcome the church. Even in lockdown and in this time of uncertainty and suffering, Jesus has been continuing to build his church and it's good to know that all we have to do is to trust Him that he is doing this. In fact, as we look back over the past, we can draw confidence for the present and the future, nothing will prevail against the church, the people of God, however bleak their situation becomes.

So we are assured that Jesus is building his church as people acknowledge and accept his identity. Our role is not to sit back and relax but to make disciples. This is the task that we as a church should concentrate and focus on above everything else.

First, we need to live the life of a disciple. Our Diocesan Rule of Life shows us that a disciple is someone who prays, reads the Bible and learns what it means to be a disciple and they

are someone who tells of Jesus to others, serves the needs of others and gives of their time, talents and treasure. We live this life each day whether at home, at work or in our local community.

Then we need as church to equip others to live as disciples. This won't happen by accident but only when it is planned. Teaching others about the Rule of Life is a good place to start. The pandemic has made us think about what it means to be church when we have been unable to meet in our buildings and to share in communion.

At times, we might have felt overwhelmed and missing seeing one another but we don't need to be anxious and afraid. Jesus loves his church and assures us that he is looking after us, all he wants is for us to live as his disciples and make disciples of others. This was the way Jesus himself worked. He was able to train a group of 12 over 3 years to act and be like him in such a way they changed the course of human history forever.

Jesus is asking us today: 'who do you say I am?' What will your answer be? Who is Jesus to you in reality and not in theory? What difference does he make to your life? What difference would you like Him to make to your life?

Let me finish with the Diocesan prayer: Loving Father, by your grace we long to see more people knowing Jesus and more justice in your world. Help us to live as your disciples in the power of the Spirit and to work to your praise and glory. Amen.