

Mark sermon series: Week 4

28/06/15

09:45 St Peter

Mark 8:27-33; 9:2-10; 9:30-37

Can you think of an important question you have been asked. Here are some you might know:

"To be, or not to be, that is the question" writes Shakespeare in Hamlet.

Or from more modern art, "You talkin to me?" says Robert De Niro's character in the film Taxi Driver.

Then there is the question put to the supercomputer Deep Thought in the Hitchhikers Guide to the Universe: "What is the Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything" (42). An answer received with contempt, to which the computer replies that the questioners didn't really understand what the question meant.

So what is the question - the most important question we could be asked? Mark chapter 8 offers us one answer to that.

In our series of sermons we have reflected on Mark first telling us this is book of "Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" and we are left in no doubt what is to come. We hear of Jesus fulfilling the coming of the Kingdom of God, where the hungry must be fed and the sick healed. And the urgency of this Kingdom requires our focus to move from ourselves to the needs of others around us, but to do so requires that we trust in the One who is able to quell the storms of our lives.

All of these 7 chapters lay out the ground of proclaiming to the reader who this Jesus is, and what the Kingdom of God that he proclaims means for our lives. Mark has an urgency about him, for us to realise ourselves - perhaps so distant from the actual history - the importance that Jesus central question for us.

In Chapter 8 we get to the very core of Mark's Gospel. And one question. "And who do you say that I am?" Perhaps the most searching question we can be asked. It is the question lying at the heart of our faith. "Who is Jesus to me"?

We note that it isn't a question asked to our neighbour or our family. But to me - to each one of us individually. We hear a version of it in the service of baptism; at our confirmation and for those of us in holy orders, at our ordination. So far Jesus has explained what his purpose is - the Kingdom of God. Now, Jesus asks, "Will you be part of this great adventure of the Kingdom of God?". When did we last ask that question deep inside ourselves - who is Jesus to me?

And Peter's answers Jesus, "You are the Messiah" is his confession of faith. His is the model of confessional faith - he gets it. But straight away he shows that he doesn't, because he immediately tries to talk Jesus out of the consequences of understanding who he is.

For immediately after ask the question, "Who do you say that I am?", Jesus teaches his disciples that he must suffer and be rejected. And Peter tries to talk him out of it, and receives a rebuke for he is too focussed on the human plight of Jesus, and not his divine purpose. For the Kingdom is not of this world, but is to come to this world. And this Son of Man is also Son of God.

To make the point, in our second reading Mark takes us to the mountain top and a mysterious encounter with the divine. An event further away from our normal human encounter we can't imagine. We are

asked by Jesus to understand that if we profess him as the Messiah - the anointed one of God - then we must also be prepared to get caught up in the mystery of the Kingdom. In that encounter, to remind us who Jesus is, we hear words now familiar to us "This is my Son, the Beloved", and the command "Listen to him". We remember a version of those words from Jesus' baptism. The voice of God from heaven speaking at these divine moments reminding us again who this man is.

From now on, the focus of Mark moves elsewhere. No longer are we concerned with the question of who Jesus is. But to the place where the acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord naturally leads. One of suffering, rejection, and the testing of our faith. Our faith bids us to a life of service: for "whoever wants to be first must be last and servant of all". And a life of welcome and generous hospitality - welcoming the child, and in turn welcoming God. It is in this service and hospitality that we will know this suffering and rejection, as well as great joy.

From now on Mark turns his focus towards Jerusalem. But that one stark question remains, searching all our hearts, begging to transform our lives - "Who do you say that I am?".

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