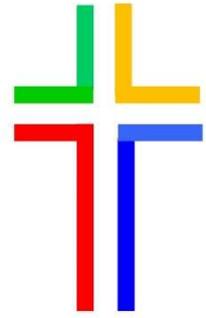


Week St Mary Methodist Church –

Sunday 23 August



Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. (Isaiah 51:4)

If you are aware of anyone who would like a copy of our weekly worship sheet or you would like an extra copy to give or send to someone, please just let us know.

PRAYER

Lord, we have set aside some time to be with you, to read this service sheet, and to reflect on your word. Help us to hold on to this time and our focus on you - as we go through the rest of the week, as other things jostle for our

attention, as we think about the daily news, as we get distracted by our worldly cares. Help us to remember that it is our relationship with you that is the important thing in our life. **Amen**

READING FOR TODAY Matthew 16:13-20 (NIV)

Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah

¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'

¹⁴They 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?'

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

¹⁷Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.¹⁸And 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.¹⁹I 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.'²⁰Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

REFLECTION

This is a well known episode in the ministry of Jesus and occurs in a very similar fashion in three of the Gospels. There are a number of significant issues that stem from this dialogue with the disciples.

In all the Gospel writings, Jesus never explicitly comes out with a statement saying 'I am the Messiah, the promised anointed one'. There are occasions, like this one, where someone concludes that Jesus is the Messiah, and Jesus confirms that it is so. Another example would be in John Chapter 10, where people gathered around Jesus and said 'tell us the truth, are you the Messiah'. And Jesus replies 'I have already told you'. And then there was the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus had talked to her about living water and she had said I know that the Messiah is coming, who will explain

everything. Jesus replies 'I am he'. Jesus doesn't ever volunteer a clear claim to be the Messiah. Jesus wanted people to make their own assessment, based on his teachings and actions, and reach their own conclusions about who he was.

We might also speculate on Peter's thought processes. He knew what others were saying about who Jesus was – John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah. But Peter had to mentally rule those out before he could move on. Then he reached a conclusion and being Peter, impetuous as ever, blurted it out – 'you are the Messiah, the son of the living God'. But was it all Peter's reasoning? Much more likely, as confirmed by Jesus, was that God had revealed the truth to Peter. So Peter became the vehicle by which this conclusion was revealed to the other disciples.

When Peter said 'you are the Messiah', Jesus blessed him and went on to say 'you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church'. This is a well known play on words because Peter means rock. But it also indicates the importance of Peter as the foundation of a new movement. He wasn't to do it alone, the other disciples were also leaders. But Peter would have a decisive role in deciding what was going to be permissible in this new community, that is what 'whatever you bind on earth, will be bound in heaven' is all about. And Peter did that, didn't he? Remember his crucial vision, in Acts chapter 10, of the animals being let down on a sheet. It was Peter who convinced the early church that the message of Jesus should be taken to all the Gentiles with no pre-conditions about following Jewish practises. Jesus knew that Peter would exercise this leading role in taking the church forward.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

Jesus said that he would build his church on the rock of Peter and the other disciples. We pray for church leaders everywhere that continue trying to build a church in these difficult times.

Peter listened to his inner voice saying that Jesus is the Messiah. We pray for rulers and politicians across the world and ask that they listen to their inner voices rather than superficial worldly messages.

Jesus wanted his disciples to learn. In a week of disruptive educational news we pray for children and students and all those responsible for education.

Amen.

HYMN H&P 257, StF 322

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary, rest.

And then in that final sentence in our reading Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone he was the Messiah. In Mark and Luke as well, Jesus issued the same important instruction. Peter had worked out, with divine guidance, that Jesus was the Messiah; in front of all the disciples Jesus agreed that he was and yet he told them to keep quiet about it. Why? The answer goes back to Jewish expectation of who the Messiah would be and what he would do. They were thinking of a warrior king, one who would set them free from Roman rule. Rejection of a Messiah simply wasn't to be contemplated. But Jesus was anxious to avoid popular enthusiasm, based on earthly understanding, rather than what Jesus was teaching. It is noteworthy that from here onwards Jesus concentrated his teachings on the disciples, getting them to see things in kingdom terms. That is why Jesus said 'don't tell anyone'.

Dear Name - the Rock on which I build,
My Shield and Hiding Place,
My never-failing Treasury filled
With boundless stores of grace!

Jesus! my Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King;
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought;
But when I see Thee as Thou art,
I'll praise Thee as I ought.

Till then I would Thy love proclaim
With every fleeting breath,
And may the music of Thy name
Refresh my soul in death.

BLESSING

Peter said 'You are the Messiah, the son of the living God'.

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be upon us and remain with us always.
Amen

"An ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge". John Wesley