**Matthew 16: 13-19**

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ’Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ’But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ’You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ’Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16%3A13-19&version=ESV#fen-ESV-23690a)] I will build my church, and the gates of hell[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16%3A13-19&version=ESV#fen-ESV-23690b)] shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16%3A13-19&version=ESV#fen-ESV-23691c)] in heaven.’

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

Pretty well everyone who has ever been to school has had this experience: the teacher asks a question that you don’t know the answer to. What do you do? Keep your eyes down, hoping not to draw attention to yourself? Sit up and look confident but fail to make eye contact just in case? Look round at everyone else, hoping one of them knows the answer and is eager to share it? Whatever you do, you can feel the tension: the increased heart rate, the creeping blush, the dry mouth and the shiver of cold or trickle of sweat.

This class that Jesus was teaching was a bunch of remedial kids – the ones who left school as soon as they could – if indeed they went in the first place. They weren’t ever going to win prizes for academic effort. But give them their due, they had heard Jesus’ call and responded to it with all their being. However, today he is asking questions. The first one isn’t so bad: who do people say the Son of Man is? I could get the roving mic and ask around the pews – but I’ve seen how people glaze over when I’ve done that at KEYS services – all that checking for dust on the shelf of the pew in front of you….

So maybe I won’t. But who DO people say the Son of Man is? In a sense that’s the easy question, because all you have to do - all the disciples had to do – was regurgitate the word on the street. When you are reporting third parties, it’s not hard – because any wrong answer isn’t your wrong answer. So they all chip in: well, Jesus, some people say you are John the Baptist, others think you’re Elijah, and yet others say you might be Jeremiah or another one of the prophets. These answers reveal nothing about the disciples; they are simply sharing local gossip.

Maybe Jesus was making them comfortable first, before he went for the jugular. I had a Latin teacher who did that. General impressions and sound bites gleaned from a variety of unnamed sources clearly aren’t enough for Jesus’ purposes. So here it comes: who do **you** say that I am?

Oh whoop de doo – here we go. Now the disciples are shuffling their feet and looking anywhere but at the Master; clearing their throats and looking deep in thought, but formulating absolutely nothing. **Now** shall I get the roving mic out?

Can you sense the total panic? The sort of panic that some confirmation candidates tell me they have felt before we started confirmation preparation…….but then, for the record, they find that it’s not about right and wrong answers; it’s about exploring individual faith and learning how to join the dots of knowledge in a way that makes sense to the individual.

It is that little word ‘you’ that makes all the difference in the world, whether asking a question or giving direction. It implicates an individual. Incidentally, it is reportedly the first word God spoke to a human being: **you** may freely eat of any tree in the garden – apart from that one over there. And suddenly Adam and Eve were conscious that they had a stake in Creation as well as a place in God’s heart, just as we do.

But back to Jesus and his question. Who do you say that I am? So the disciples shuffle and look at the ground, but Peter – who can always be relied on to open his mouth before he engages his brain – speaks up: You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. And Jesus sees it for what it is: not a textbook regurgitation that the others may have been trying to formulate – something that they think Jesus wants them to say, but a genuine response from the heart. And Jesus blesses him for it. Jesus never wants us to second guess him, but only to use our hearts and minds to say what we mean. Regardless.

But one of the things we explored during the confirmation sessions (note I am careful not to call them ‘classes’ because the purpose of them is not to give answers but to encourage people to find out how they feel about God for themselves). One of the things we explored was articulating our own personal insights and experiences of God. Of course, there are non-negotiables in Christian and other faith, but the God who made us and loves us wants us to come to know Him by whatever route we take. Not by copying what the people in the street are saying, nor by reading a textbook and repeating the words, but by responding to God wherever we may encounter Him. Or Her. Doing what Peter did in that moment.

Common fishermen didn’t have access to a whole lot of book-learning, but they must have had wow moments: sunrises and sunsets, storms and the silver shimmer of nets full of sequinned fish. Wow moments that spoke of the power of a God who created all of that and more. What are your wow moments? Jesus wants to know who he is to each of us. Who do **you** say that I am?

And if I don’t bring the roving mic round, will you still think about that question and answer it for yourself? And what will you say? Is God a word we use only in church? Or carelessly in speaking of other things OMG? Or does God matter to you? **Flesh and blood cannot reveal this to you, said Jesus to Peter; but only my father who is in heaven.**

There was a song written in the mid nineties called What if God was one of us? We could take it as a cynical putdown of faith, or we can remember that the central affirmation of our Christian faith - the bit that makes us Christian – is the bit that acknowledges that God did indeed come to earth as one of us, a human being. And if we met Jesus as a human being, as his original disciples did, rather than in classical art or the narrow confines of the church institution, in hushed tones, maybe it would be easier to say who he is to us.

The song was nominated for three Grammys though it didn’t win in any of the categories, and was covered by Alanis Morrisette; part of it goes like this:

What if God was one of us?  
Just a slob like one of us?  
Just a stranger on the bus   
Trying to make His way home?  
If God had a face, what would it look like?  
And would you want to see  
If seeing meant that you would have to believe  
In things like Heaven and in Jesus and the saints  
And all the prophets? And...  
  
What if God was one of us  
Just a slob like one of us  
Just a stranger on the bus  
Trying to make His way home?  
  
Trying to make His way home  
Back up to Heaven all alone  
Nobody calling on the phone  
'Cept for the Pope, maybe, in Rome

What **if** God was one of us?

God **was** – and is - one of us, in the person of Jesus Christ. Can we be bold like Peter, and say what we see.

**Amen**