

Homily – lips and lives

There's a moment in the Gospel when everything seems to pause. Jesus has taken the disciples north, away from the crowds, away from the familiar villages of Galilee, to the region of Caesarea Philippi. It's a place full of shrines, full of competing claims about gods, kings, and powers and an apparent gateway to Hades – the underworld. And in that setting Jesus turns to his friends and asks the question that lies at the heart of Christian faith: *"Who do you say that I am?"*

Peter answers with clarity and conviction: *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."* It is a moment of insight, a moment of faith, a moment when Peter sees something true about Jesus that others have missed. But what is striking is what happens next. Jesus blesses Peter for his faith — and then immediately places responsibility upon him. Faith leads to vocation. Insight leads to calling. Revelation leads to responsibility.

Jesus speaks of keys, of Hades, of a rock on which the Church will be built. These are weighty images. The keys represent authority — not domination, but stewardship. The one who holds the keys is entrusted with care, with discernment, with the responsibility to open what should be opened and close what should be closed. The rock is not a pedestal but a foundation — the steady, dependable

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ground on which others can stand. And in this place which was thought to contain a passage to Hades – Jesus is saying that whatever opposition is thrown up to bar the church from progressing, whether that be politically or spiritually, it won't be strong enough to hold back the followers of Jesus.

In other words, Peter's confession is not simply admired; it is commissioned. His faith is not just a private conviction; it becomes a public responsibility. And that pattern has never changed. To confess Christ is always to be entrusted with something. Faith is never just an opinion; it is a calling.

But before we rush to Peter's responsibilities, we need to linger with Jesus' question. "*Who do you say that I am?*" It is asked of every Christian, in every generation. And it is possible to answer it correctly — doctrinally, theologically — and still miss its depth. Many Christians can say the right words: Son of God, Redeemer, Saviour, Lord. These are true, essential, foundational. But Jesus is not testing us for the correct textbook response. He is asking for a confession of the heart. He is asking how we see him, how we relate to him, how we follow him.

Is Jesus simply a historical figure we admire? A moral teacher we quote? A symbol of goodness? Or is he the one who gives meaning to our lives, who shapes our decisions, who guides our steps, who

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offers us hope? Is he the one whose voice we listen for, whose character we seek to imitate, whose compassion we try to embody?

The danger — and we see it in every age — is that people can call Jesus “Lord” while living in ways that contradict everything he taught. History is full of figures who invoked Christ while pursuing power, violence, prejudice, or self-interest. And our own age is no different. It is entirely possible to say the right words about Jesus and yet fail to follow him. Jesus himself warns us of this in Matthew’s Gospel: *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”* And as I’ve said before, Jesus Most popular insult for those who opposed him was to call them a hypocrite.

It is a sobering reminder that faith is not proved by words alone but by the shape of a life.

So when Jesus asks, *“Who do you say that I am?”* he is asking for more than a doctrinal statement. He is asking for a relationship. He is asking whether we recognise him as the one who calls us, who changes us, who sends us. He is asking whether our lives bear the marks of his grace, his compassion, his truth.

And that brings us back to Peter. His confession leads to responsibility. And so does ours. Every Christian carries a share of

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the keys — the responsibility to open doors for others, to make faith accessible, to welcome, to encourage, to forgive.

Every Christian will face opposition by something or someone, Not always outright hostility although that can happen, but perhaps indifference, ridicule, or even the more subtle and sinister works of spiritual opposition.

Every Christian is called to be a rock for someone — a steady presence, a dependable friend, a person whose faith gives others confidence.

This responsibility takes many forms. For some, it is leadership. For others, quiet service. For many, it is simply the daily work of living in a way that reflects Christ's character — in our homes, our workplaces, our conversations, our choices. But it always begins with that question: *Who do you say that I am?* And it always continues with the life that follows from the answer.

So this morning, we hear Jesus' question again. And we answer it not only with our lips but with our lives. We confess him as Messiah, as Son of the living God — and we ask for grace to live the responsibility that comes with that confession. May our faith be more than words. May it be a way of life. May it be the rock on which others can stand.

Amen

Rev'd Richard Haynes 12th Sunday after Trinity