

Sermon 30/07/24 – God the Son

When my granddaughter was about five, she and I went to our first horse show. She was riding in one of the gymkhana events helpfully called ‘ride and run’. With their ponies on leading reins the children ride the length of the course, at a speed dictated by the running capability of the parent holding the rein, at the far end the children dismount and run back up the course to the start line. Parents and ponies follow more sedately and collect the riders. Izzy, delighted by her fourth place rosette, declared it the ‘best horse show ever’.

It's ok. I do realise that you may be thinking what on earth has that got to do with the creed? But its alright we **are** still thinking about the creed, in fact today we are thinking about God the Son.

‘the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made. Of one being with the Father: through whom all things were made.

But I am still obviously on the wrong page as one of the whole points is that the Messiah, the Son of God, when he came was not riding on a war horse or Shetland pony – it was not like that. No it wasn't. But Jesus, as in ride and run, starts out with his Father, they are then parted as Jesus begins his earthly existence, to be united again after the ascension.

Those words at the beginning of John's gospel send a shiver down my spine, not because they are most often heard in a cold church at midnight on Christmas Eve but the beauty of the poetry:

In the beginning was the Word

and the Word was with God

and the Word was God.

The footnotes in my Bible helpfully explain that those three uses of the word ‘was’ are subtly different – the first is used to denote existence. The Word existed at the very beginning. The second to indicate the presence of the Word with God, importantly in communication with God. And the third, due to the nature of the Greek language, indicates a prediction that the Word is God. The Word has been and will be around for a long time.

The Jews were waiting for the long promised Messiah and their expectations had become focused on the idea of a war lord who would defeat all their enemies and restore to them their own leadership and unchallenged worship. Who would not have wished for that living as they were under this uneasy arrangement of King Herod and the Romans. The situation was ripe for rescue but what do they get – a wandering preacher, who encourages the poor and the marginalised, who challenges Jewish authority and claims that he is the Son of God. It is not possible for us to put what we know into the context of 1st century Israel. We are aware there were other preachers, other healers, but we have no knowledge of what they did, or claimed to do. And that is one of the interesting parts of the gospel story – so often Jesus tells the healed not to tell anyone what has happened.

The light is shining in the darkness but the world does not realise what it is seeing. There is a secretiveness about Jesus as though he must be acknowledged not by his words but his works.

He does not go around telling everyone that he is God's Son but rather lets them come to that conclusion slowly as a result of his actions.

But he does tell his disciples about his relationship with God. In Matthew and in Luke we hear him declare that because he is God's Son there are things that he knows, which would be known only to a Son. Only to someone with that level of intimacy would know these things. So confusingly we have a Jesus who is much more open with some people while downplaying his identity with others.

But despite this in places he is recognised as God's Son. The disciples one night while in a boat blown about by the wind see him walking towards them on the water, and then encouraged Peter climbs out of the boat to go to meet him, but his courage fails and he begins to sink. Jesus catches him, takes him to safety and the wind subsides. 'Truly' say the disciples, 'You are the Son of God'.

Later he challenges the disciples, firstly as to who others say that he is, and then directly to them, 'Who do you say that I am?' It is Peter who replies, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God'.

As the end of his life approaches the closeness of the relationship between Jesus, the Son, and his Father becomes more apparent. In the conversation at the last supper the disciples question where he is going, and he emphasises again that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. The relationship is further illuminated at the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus asks his Father directly to spare him from what is to come. But he acknowledges that God's will must be done and accepts that he cannot be spared.

Jesus presence causes so much disquiet to the authorities. His actions while on the one hand challenging the 'rules' were not those of someone simply trying to make trouble. There was always a clear motive behind them. He was a practising Jew who challenged Jewishness. Hardly surprising then that when he faced the Sanhedrin after his arrest the Chief Priest found it necessary to ask, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?'. Even then he receives no simple yes or no answer.

The disciples have been privileged to the intimacy of Jesus with his Father, the explanations of how they relate and how people relate with them. But as the gospel story nears its climax, it is not a member of his close group, not indeed a member of the Jewish community, but a member of the foreign military who as a result of what he has seen declares unprompted to those present; and echoed today as Christians say the creed, 'Truly this was the Son of God'.