

Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Collect: O God, you declare your almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity: mercifully grant to us such a measure of your grace, that we, running the way of your commandments, may receive your gracious promises, and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 138: *Refrain: Your loving-kindness, O Lord, endures for ever.*

- ¹ I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods will I sing praise to you.
² I will bow down towards your holy temple and praise your name, because of your love and faithfulness; for you have glorified your name and your word above all things.
³ In the day that I called to you, you answered me; you put new strength in my soul. [R]
⁴ All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.
⁵ They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, that great is the glory of the Lord.
⁶ Though the Lord be high, he watches over the lowly; as for the proud, he regards them from afar. [R]
⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you will preserve me; you will stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies; your right hand will save me.
⁸ The Lord shall make good his purpose for me; your loving-kindness, O Lord, endures for ever; forsake not the work of your hands. [R]

Romans 12.1–8: I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Matthew 16.13–20: ¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ ¹⁴ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ¹⁵ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Reflection from Keir Dow (Curate):

In today’s Gospel reading we have heard about the time Jesus and the disciples were in Caesarea Philippi. This follows on from a series of missional stories on which Matthew has focused and the use of these acts as allowing people to open up to God. Jesus had been gaining such a following that there were those in positions of authority who felt threatened.

Caesarea Phillipi was a Gentile city in the north. I like to think that Jesus' work was getting too much attention from the Law and that the group headed to Caesarea Phillipi to get away from things and let the 'heat' die down. But here they all are, resting and being away from the rather amazing and busy experiences of late. It is in this quiet time that Jesus is asking about who the people think he is? Is this Jesus scoping out what was thought before dropping the bombshell of who he really was? Did they know already, were they suspicious? Predictably the disciples come up with the standard safe answers, John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or another prophet.

Then comes the Big question, "But who do you think I am?" I picture this as them all staring at the floor but hesitant to answer. Simon pipes up with what everyone is thinking, "You are the Messiah, the son of the Living God". I would've said "Bingo, excellent answer, well done". But Jesus says, "for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father in heaven." So, no person has told you this but you have learned this from God. Wow, what a response. This holds such importance because the true nature of Jesus become evident to the disciples. Simon had put into words what he knew from God, what he had felt and not learned - not in his mind but in his heart. I wonder how many of us have an understanding of God that is felt rather than learned? I certainly do.

Then in the same way that Simon says that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus says that Simon is 'Peter', which mean 'rock'. This is not Jesus forgetting his name but more of a title or nickname to signify his status. Simon is "The Rock" but we hear the term used "Simon - Peter is the rock on which the church is built." But what does this actually mean? I would suggest that by this recognition of Jesus as the Messiah by Simon Peter was the key part of the 'new' church. Simon Peter was the first to recognise that Jesus is the Messiah and that **this** is the foundation of Our Church. Without the recognition of Simon Peter and our subsequent realisation that Jesus is indeed the messiah, there is no Church.

Jesus also gives Simon Peter the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. This is where we can get lost in the imagery of the pearly gates and St Peter judging people's deeds and deciding who is allowed into Heaven. But this is not what I believe Jesus means at all. The Kingdom of Heaven is not meant as a magical place where you go if you have been good enough in your life on Earth. But rather the dwelling place of God. I believe that the dwelling place of God is in us. Jesus gave Simon Peter the power of Access to open up people's hearts to welcome God into their lives. Our New testament reading tells us to "present our bodies to be a living sacrifice." We are asked to open ourselves to God and let him live in us and through us. So what started with Peter and the keys of heaven continues today with us taking on the same role and responsibilities of using our 'keys' to open up the Kingdom of Heaven in others. This is not about Judgement or exclusivity but rather being Stewards of the Kingdom and inviting people in. Wow, what an opportunity but what a responsibility.

Again, in Paul's letter to the Romans, He goes on to say that we are one body in Christ but how is this helpful. Are we all the same? Are we all parts of the physical Body of Christ, in that case am I his little toe? Or is it saying that we are all responsible now, in the same way that Simon / Peter was to act as Jesus's body on Earth and continue his work. So as we are told that we have 'gifts that differ according to the grace given to us'. So I have one question for you all.

Do you know what your Gifts are? This is a very hard question and different from what are you good at? What are your gifts? How can Jesus use you to open up people's hearts to God? Your gifts are the Keys to the kingdom of Heaven and because of this I encourage you all to use your gifts, whatever they are, to open the gates to the Kingdom of heaven and allow God to dwell in you and those around you.