

SILENT REFLECTIONS TUESDAY 30 MARCH 2021
"WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?"

Reflections for the start of Holy Week exploring Jesus' key question to his disciples:

"Who do you say that I am?"

The question Jesus posed to his disciples, and with which he challenged them, is a question I have often pondered on for myself. Sometimes I feel from a human perspective that it is not a question I wish to consider; but if my relationship with God in Christ is to grow and deepen and flourish then it is a question I must attend to.

It is question which is particularly pertinent as we enter another Holy Week.

I invite you to use the material in whatever way proves helpful to you. The aim is for you to dwell on this question as you follow Jesus faithfully during this Holy Week; as you carry the cross; as you faithfully watch with him.

The question to the disciples:

Jesus poses the question in Matthew 16:13-16, Mark 8:27-29, and Luke 9:18-20.

He first asks: "Who do people say I am?" (Mark 8:27) or "Who do the crowds say I am?" (Luke 9:18).

Spend some time looking at these questions by dwelling in the text and consider the answers Jesus receives. You may like to consider if they resonate with you in any way.

We look more closely at Matthew's version:

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, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' Matthew 16:13-16

Immediately afterwards Peter makes a declaration as to who Jesus is and if we read on we see Jesus' reply:
'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. 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. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 16.17-19a

This is Peter's declaration, the faltering, clumsy, disciple who will come to deny Jesus and yet he is called 'the Rock', a translation of the meaning of his name (derived from the Greek *Petros* meaning 'stone').

Take a few moments to think about those people who have shared their faith with you, who have told you who Jesus is for them. Recall how they may have influenced your relationship with Jesus.

Did it bring you into the church? As you make this recollection, you may like to take a stone in your hand (perhaps go outside if you can) or go to a quiet place in your home, and thank God for them using this prayer:

**Almighty God, who inspired your apostle Saint Peter
to confess Jesus as Christ and Son of the living God:
build up your Church upon this rock,
that in unity and peace it may proclaim one truth
and follow one Lord, your Son, our Saviour Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever,
Amen.**

Post Communion Prayer for the Feast of St Peter

“Who do you say that I am”? – It’s meaning

‘I Am’ is an important phrase throughout the bible. God first declares this name for himself in the book of Exodus, when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush.

But Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your ancestors has sent me to you”, and they ask me, “What is his name?” what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I AM has sent me to you.”’ (Exodus 3.13-14)

Jesus extends this by using multiple ‘I am’ statements:

I am the Bread of Life (John 6.35)

I am the Light of the Word (John 8.12)

I am the Gate (John 10.7)

I am the Good Shepherd (John 10.11)

I am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11.25)

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14.6)

I am the Vine (John 15.1)

One of these well-known ‘I am’ sayings may have particular significance for you. If one does take time to renew yourself with it: when did it first have significance for you?

Is it helpful to recall that? If it is appropriate to revisit the saying, thank God for all that it means to you.

If it is not helpful perhaps use the ‘I am’ saying below:

I am the Good Shepherd (John 10.11)

Take time to read the well-known Psalm 23:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

As you pray through this Psalm, take each line or phrase slowly. Do not rush through it. Take time to pause and 'stay with it' and if it brings to the surface a thought or the slightest murmur from the Spirit, then hold onto that and consider whether you wish to go any further. You can come back to the Psalm another time as you consider the Jesus' saying: 'I am the Good Shepherd'.

From Malcolm Guite on Psalm 23

To suffer my own dereliction for me,

To be my shepherd, and to lead me through

The grave and gate of death, in strength and mercy

Christ has come down. At last I've found the true Shepherd

and the false just fade away

Before him. I will sing of how he drew

Me from the snares I set myself, how day

Dawned on my darkness, how he brought me forth,

Converted me and opened up the way

For me, and led me gently on that path,

Led me beside still waters, promised me

That he'd be with me all my days on earth,
And when my last day comes, accompany
And comfort me, as evening shadows fall,
And draw me into his eternity.

David's Crown: Sounding the Psalms Malcolm Guite, 2021

And who am I?

We cannot consider the question of Jesus 'Who do you say I am?' without also looking at ourselves. We are vulnerable, fallen, broken creatures, yet God's loving gaze is upon us as we ask ourselves this question.

But now thus says the LORD,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.*

² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.

³ For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

⁴ *Because you are precious in my sight,
and honoured, and I love you,*

⁵ Do not fear, for I am with you; *Isaiah 43.1-3a; 4b-5a*

Do you know that you are loved unconditionally by God? Do you know that you are called by name, chosen, and redeemed? Do you know that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ? Let the words of Isaiah help you dwell on these truths.

Final Prayer:

Who am I? This or the other? Am I one person today, and tomorrow another? Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others, and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling? Or is something within me still like a beaten army, fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine. Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.

from *Letters and Papers from Prison*: Dietrich Bonhoeffer.