**The Big Reveal**

**Sermon for Cashmere Presbyterian Church**

**Sunday 12th September 2021**

**Preacher: Rev Hamish Galloway**

**Text: Mark 8:27-38**

**Introduction**

This passage involves a big reveal and a big invitation!

1. **The Reveal**

Have you ever played the game where someone writes the name of a famous person on a stick-it note and sticks it on your forehead? You can’t see whose name it is, but the others can. Then, by asking yes or no questions, you need to guess who it is.

Mark’s gospel has an element of this game in its DNA. The commentator Nineham describes how the gospel of Mark is split into 2 halves. He says we can only understand this Mark 8 passage fully if we understand its place in the narrative. It is, he says, the beginning of Mark part 2, which he sub-titles *‘From Galilee to Jerusalem: The character of Jesus’ Messiahship is gradually disclosed.’* The first section, chapters 1-7, describes a whole series of deeds and incidents that raise the question – who is this man!?

For example, after the calming of the storm incident in Mark 4, the disciples asked each other – I imagine, from the text, in hushed tones – ‘who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’ (4:41)

When I think on this, I am reminded of a TV programme that I followed for a number of series, Blacklist. The main characters are Raymond Reddington and Elizabeth Keen. As the plot thickens the questions of who they really are and whether they are working for good or evil elevate. There are similarities with the Jesus story; by the time we get to the passage in Mark 8 the questions about Jesus have gathered real momentum – who is he? where do his powers come from? is he for good or evil (the Pharisees certainly thought the latter)? Now, while the questions of real identity in the Blacklist programme fascinated me for quite a while, I eventually gave up on the programme because there seemed to be no real answers, no big reveal. I was continually left guessing, left wondering. Not so with the Jesus story! It is more like another TV programme I am watching at the moment, where George Clark is helping people renovate and restore old English homes. They plan together, observe work in progress, ask questions about how it will turn out, but then the owners stay away as the finishing touches are added and then George brings them in for the big reveal of the finished product.

So it is with Jesus – for some time now those closest to him have walked with him, watched him, seen his ministry develop, asked lots of questions, but here and now is the George Clark reveal moment! For the first time the issue of who he is, is revealed.

***The reveal*** happens in 3 parts:- Who do people say I am? Who do you say I am? Let me explain more fully who I am!

1. Who do people say I am?

I love the way the conversation unfolds. This is how I imagine it. They are walking along between villages, all the talk is about the vibe around Jesus, the big crowds, his popular following and what people are saying about him. It is upbeat and excited conversation. Jesus uses this to pivot into a big reveal. He pivots well: the first question is non-threatening and easy to answer – who do people say I am?

Well, the disciples can answer quickly – the gossip is you ae one of the greats of the past come back from the dead! ‘John the Baptist; Elijah; one of the prophets!’

We, too, could probably answer this question easily today – who do people say Jesus is? Well more has been written about him by far than any other human being! The biggest religion in the world bears his name and millions of sermons and books have been written on who he is! We could probably answer this quickly and well.

*But* then it gets personal –

1. Who do you say I am?

This is not so easy. I notice people’s body language change at this question; a little less sure and acknowledging that this is getting more personal, maybe a little awkward – like, do I trust you with my answers here?

But Peter doesn’t have this problem. It reads like a burst of inspiration that comes out spontaneously and inspired – ‘You are the Messiah/Christ.’ That is, the Messiah sent from God!

1. Jesus completes the reveal

Next, there is the strange warning to not tell anyone! Why not? Surely this is world shattering news! But there is a reason for this that comes clearly out of the text – it is the disconnect between what the disciples thought Messiah meant, and who Jesus actually was!

Peter and the disciples would have been thinking of Messiahship in the popular terms of the day – a conquering hero who would overthrow the Roman oppressors! Jesus, however, goes on to ‘clearly explain’ that he will be a suffering servant Messiah who will be rejected by the religious leaders, killed by them, but who will rise again! The fact that Peter takes Jesus aside and rebuked Jesus for this shows the disconnect. Peter and the disciples liked the conquering hero Messiah narrative, not a rejected, suffering and crucified Christ! Yet Jesus rejects this conquering hero narrative Peter wants for him as being on the same level as the temptations in the wilderness where Satan tempts him to avoid the suffering of the cross!

Jesus knew, as we now have come to see, the cross and resurrection are the key elements that define who he is – a suffering servant totally vindicated by God as his son!

Jesus didn’t want them to tell anyone he was the Messiah because they still didn’t fully understand – they would give the wrong message. It would be most fully revealed at the time of resurrection.

And *then* there is the invitation!

1. **The invitation**

This is like George Clark saying to the owners of the newly renovated home, ‘come in and make this your own!’ Jesus calls them to follow him and to imitate him in his humble journey of Messiahship.

I think there are 3 steps to this invitation:

1. Follow me
2. Follow my example
3. Welcome to life in all its fullness

I believe that the key element to understand here is to understand what it means to ‘deny self’ and how that leads to life. And I think it goes like this:

**First step** is to know that we are loved by God – that we are a child of God, unconditionally loved by him. Jesus knew this in a deep and unique way, but we all, in our own way, can know that too. Today at church we baptise baby Lily, even before she can respond! We are saying you are loved to bits by God, regardless of how you respond. There is nothing you can do that will make God love you more or less! Ultimately, it is your choice to accept or reject. But if you do accept and that drills down deep into your heart, you will know a deep love and acceptance that we all crave for. It is a love and acceptance that allows us to be secure enough to stop the need to push ourselves forward, or, as Nineham puts it, ‘bend all our energies to preserving, securing and enriching our own lives.’

While, for the disciples, dying for their faith would become a literal reality, for us today it means, I believe, to be so secure in God’s love that we can forget about self-promotion and, instead, think about others! For indeed, it seems to me that those who are most pushy about themselves are those who are most insecure about themselves. But to know God’s love allows us the freedom to reach out to the needs of others, rather than being trapped in looking after our own neediness!

This is the classic gospel message:-

Love God

Love others

 as you love yourself.

The three flow – love of God leads to a secure sense of who you are (loved, so I can accept and love myself), which frees us to love others.

And that*,* Jesus says, will bring you life; a soul filled life; a spirit inspired, God grounded life, as it was designed to be lived!

**Conclusion**

To know who Jesus truly is, to follow him then as he invites us to do, this is the key to life in all its fulness!