

## Sermon 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Words from this morning's psalm:

Let the words of my mouth and the thought of my heart find favour before you, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

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“When Mysterio revealed my identity, my entire life got messed up”.

No, it's ok you were listening and that quote is not from the gospel we just heard.

Actually, it's from the new Spiderman film 'No way home', which is due out in December, I gather. I'd show you the trailer, but we'd get sued for copyright infringement!

Now, you won't be surprised to hear that my knowledge of superheroes is a bit limited, unlike Gareth's. So I asked my grand-daughters which was their favourite and they said they don't follow that stuff (slightly sniffily I thought), and my grandson is too small yet.

However, I do know that Spiderman's identity is an Important Thing, and that it was accidentally revealed to the whole world in the last film so the next is all about trying to put that right. As the world begins to fall apart into chaos, Spiderman's father comments in the trailer 'the problem is you, trying to live two different lives – the longer you do it, the more dangerous it becomes',.

We'll find out more about how Spiderman's identity works at Christmas, then, and if he fixes the chaos – and roughly at the same time we'll be reminded about Jesus' identity as we celebrate his Incarnation, God revealed as a human baby entirely without the aid of a bite from a radioactive spider.

Now to today's gospel...an episode that is a turning point...

The city of Caesarea Philippi was famous for its worship of the pagan god, Pan, and named after Augustus Caesar and a local king Philip (the Tetrarch – sounds like another superhero, but wasn't). It was a place where if people knew Jesus' identity as 'God with us' in the world he would be in lots of trouble, and it wasn't yet time for that.

And as they were walking along, Jesus asks the Important Question of the Week:

'Who do you say that I am?'

They're not all sure, but then Peter blabs it out 'You're the Messiah, the Christ' – in other words, the one whom God has anointed to save the whole world.

Now, Caesar thought that that was *him*, and people had to call *him* Saviour and Lord. So that's why Jesus 'sternly orders' them not to blab his identity just yet – it would become obvious later.

You see, what Peter said was true of course, but the people thought that the Messiah (Hebrew) or Christ (Greek) was going to lead an uprising against the Romans and defeat all the enemies of God with an army. They thought the Messiah was a Superhero – (Super (Latin) meaning beyond and Hero (Greek) meaning Protector/Defender, since you ask).

But Jesus the Christ is no Superhero. He'd just told them that prophets had foretold he must suffer and die in order to save the world, and his way was humble not combative, peaceful not violent. Absolutely the opposite of a Superhero!

Many people in our world seek to make peace by using violent force, and indeed the church has often colluded with that, but it simply doesn't work for the long-term, as the Afghanistan experience and many more before it teach us.

The way to peace lies in building a world together that collaborates, shares, loves, co-operates. Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be as close to God as children to a loving parent, says Jesus.

But it's all too tempting to believe that Jesus IS a superhero who should prevent all suffering, stop all wars in their tracks, save people from accidents, from loss, from mourning, from sadness.

Yet that is to set our mind on human things, not divine things.

All those difficult things are still there in our world, as many of us know only too painfully, because the kingdom Jesus began on the cross and through his resurrection is not yet fully here. But the point is that from the good news he proclaimed we *know* the way to at least reduce suffering...

Robyn mentioned some of them last week, but here are a few more...

- Love God and love your neighbour as yourself. So learn how to love yourself and then share it with all you meet.
- Love even your enemies. So make peace, not war. The justice of God is restorative, not punitive.
- Be generous with your possessions and don't hoard them. So share and aid at a global level if you're a leader of a country.

And so on, and so on. But it's not easy, it's a burden – that's why Jesus says we need to take up a sort of cross of our own if we are to follow him.

Jesus defeated evil on the cross in his sacrifice of love, but when you're in the middle of difficult times the burden is still heavy. We need the support and reassurance of friend and others in those times, to help carry the burden.

In the fictional film, Peter Parker said “When Mysterio revealed my identity, my entire life got messed up”. His living two lives made the world fall apart very dangerously.

But Jesus has one life, a fully integrated human/divine resurrection life, and in real history, at Pentecost, after Jesus’ resurrection, Peter the Disciple finally got it. He finally realised that when Jesus revealed *his* identity on the cross, evil was defeated and the entire lives of everyone in the world were *freed and opened up* to the love of God to build up a world that does things God’s way.

It’s a call to renewal, to counter-cultural holiness of life, to working for social justice.

And in the end, when the kingdom fully comes, in the new heaven and new earth, all suffering and pain will finally end and sorrow and dying, and even the need for fictional superheroes, will be no more. We believe in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come.

At that turning-point place in his ministry Jesus asks ‘Who do you say that I am?’

As Christians, we know Peter’s answer is the right one, and so we celebrate the abundant life Jesus offers to all.

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