

## LOCKDOWN DAY 152 – 25 AUGUST 2020

Molweni dear family and friends of False Bay Diocese,

Scripture: Matthew 16:13-20    Hymn: *All my Hope on God is founded*

Our recovery rate of Covid 19 cases presently translates to 84%. Our Health Care professionals continue to be ‘treasures in earthen vessels’. All of our friends and family who are in self isolation or hospitals, as they are infected with the coronavirus, remember that you too hold the treasure in earthen vessels and that the surpassing power of God’s healing is of God and not from us. As we look towards reopening our worship centres as from 1 September 2020, please continue to be vigilant in doing your part to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Wear masks, wash your hands, keep social distancing. For those who have lost loved ones, sorrow is deep. We pray that God is your anchor. For those who have financial problems, we pray for inner peace. We pray that family relationships will shift from harsh anger to love. In this month of compassion, we remember that we have the ability to change the tide of the times, as God’s compassion moving through us can do more than we can ask or imagine.

As we look again at the gospel text of Sunday past, the question Jesus asked his disciples was “Who do you say that I am?” That question needs a response from us too. God made us to know him, to love him and to serve him in this life and be happy with him forever in the next. In order for us to give a true answer to the question “Who do you say that I am?” we need to reflect upon our lives and see how we have accepted God and rejected God and how God has been at work in our lives.

Whatever our role in life, whatever our position in the church or society, our starting point is the same as that of Peter and the disciples. We have to answer the same question Jesus put to them: Who do we say Jesus is? We need to bow our head and bend our knee and not just with the **mind** but with **the heart** answer the vital question and say “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” The challenge for us is to get to know Jesus better. Not to be passive Anglicans but active Anglicans who study, who pray, who reflect, who serve.

The gospel passage can be understood from many different angles and many different perspectives. To interpret the Bible, we read it in context. The gospel passage today begins with a simple statement: “*When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do the people say that the Son of Man is?*” Why is it so important to introduce this question by telling us that they were in Caesarea Philippi or close to it. Caesarea Philippi referred to in the text, is the city that was built in northern Galilee, situated at the foot of present-day Lebanon. This city was famous for being dedicated to the Greek god Pan, meaning **all** or **everything**. So, in other words this city was dedicated to the god of all things. It became Caesarea Philippi when one of the sons of Herod, Philip rebuilt the city making it into a very modern metropolis and he dedicated it to the Roman, Caesar who was worshipped as a god, so the town was named Caesarea/Caesar and Philippi/Philip. Philip’s gift to Caesar. Later, the town was renamed again when Nero became Emperor. Nero considered himself a god.

Now the context is important here. Jesus approaches the town, the metropolis, where the gods have been worshipped. The Greek god Pan, the god of all things and then Caesar, the god of the **known** world and it is specifically there that he asks his disciples “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Jesus could have asked that question anywhere but he **chose** that specific spot. Jesus wants his disciples to know that he is the God. It is not the Greek god Pan, it is not the Roman Caesar but he is God.

So, when Jesus asks the question: “*Who do people say that I am?*”, the people get it all wrong. They give the wrong answers. Then Jesus asks his disciples “*Who do you say that I am?*” and Peter replies: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” **confirming** who Jesus is, on the **spot** that was dedicated to all the false gods. Now that context is important. Because Jesus wants to show that his kingdom is built by God himself and that **kingdom is the church, the household of God**.

Jesus appoints Peter with authority and gives him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus answered him that he is a happy man, a blessed man. Why is he blessed? It was not anything of flesh and blood that revealed to Peter who Jesus was. It was the Father in heaven and **because** the Father revealed that to him, he is **blessed**.

If we wish to know who Jesus is, we need a revelation from God. That revelation has been given to us in Holy Scripture, in the tradition of the church and therefore the challenge today is for those who belong to the church to read, to reflect, to meditate upon the person of Christ. Because we will never get to know who Jesus is unless that revelation comes to us through prayer, reflection, study. Otherwise we will end up like the disciples who said: "Some say you are John the Baptist, but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." We will all have the wrong answer. It demands the discipline of study, prayer, reflection, meditation so that God can reveal to us who Jesus is. Not my own personal view who Jesus is but **who** he is. Not based on my personal understanding or what I wish him to be but who he actually is.

In the past the church was dependant upon tradition and culture. People went to church and believed **but** the present age is different. It demands knowledge, it demands reflection and most of all it demands a personal relationship with Christ in the **household of God, the church**. Only then can we, in the midst of all the Caesarea Philippis of our world, all the false gods **that** the secular world presents to us, the new Caesars, respond with awareness to that question "But who do you say that I am?" It is only through prayer, study, reflection and meditation, that we with all our heart can say to Jesus "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

I encourage you to also turn the question around and ask Jesus "*who do you say that I am?*" We are all followers of Jesus but what is our individual contribution to the church, the household of God. Every single one of us is called by God. We all have a unique contribution to make and each of our names is known to God, so it is up to us to live out the name to its fullest in the service of the kingdom.

With the faith that Peter professed in the gospel "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God", let us together proclaim that faith: *See pg 108 of An Anglican Prayer Book for Die Geloofsbelijdenis van Nicea; Isivumo Sokholo Sassenikeya; The Nicene Creed.*

Today, please **reach out** to someone who has helped you to discern and live out your calling in everyday life, as a lay person or clergy person.

Lord God our need for your mercy is great but your kindness to us is far greater. Receive the prayers that we make to you and answer them for the sake of your beloved Son, Jesus.

We pray for the Lord to show great kindness to the leaders of the church and sustain them in their call to service. *Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.*

That the Lord will show great kindness to the Rulers of nations and strengthen them in their commitment to do justice. *Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.*

That the Lord will show great kindness to the victims of poverty and prejudice and answer their cries for help. *Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.*

That the Lord will show great kindness to all listening to this reflection and defend them from all harm. *Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.*

That the Lord will show great kindness to those who have died and raise them up to everlasting life. May eternal light shine upon them. *Lord hear us. Lord Graciously hear us. Amen.*

I am, Because we Are, Because God is ... Opening hearts to heal God's world. *God knows you well.*