

'The Way of the Cross' Sermon **Luke 9 vv 18-27**

Here is another 'defining moment' in the gospel account – literally a defining moment.

Whenever we meet someone for the first time – usually ask them two questions – their name & then 'and what do you DO?' Or if attending one of those conferences where you are forced to wear a badge with name on from dawn to bedtime – constantly explaining it. Name & occupation gives us a 'badge of identity' in life. I've spent a lifetime saying 'Yes, *my name really is 'Nick Nicholls' !!*

The question here at **Luke 9v18** – is asked by Jesus himself of his own followers – **'Who do people say that I am?'** What's the current MORI poll return? And the reply comes back – not particularly conclusive – a 33% evenly divided verdict – John the Baptist > Elijah > one of the prophets...People were obviously talking about Jesus – could not do anything else –having seen the events surrounding this preacher from Galilee over preceding 3 years.

Expectations had been building – the Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah – the King who would ride in triumph into Jerusalem & drive out the Romans from the land by force & for good. Yes, the people had their king on his way to the city – but on God's terms & in God's way – not according to theirs.

We can prepare to wave our palm branches, shout our hosannas along with the rest, if we like – but there is a deeper question to be asked here in Luke 9 & a deeper identity & purpose to be discovered.

Leaving popular opinion and acclaim aside – the question is ***‘What about YOU – who do you say I am...?’*** This is one of the most dramatic moments in the gospels & if **Luke 9 v20a** were a question on Jesus’ lips in episode of *‘Middle Eastenders’* – his question would immediately be followed by *‘dum, dum...’*

But the inner circle of disciples had been with him from start of it all. They had seen him heal the sick & lame, calm the storm on lake, cast out demons, feed 5000, teach them from parables...

The crowds had followed Jesus all right – went on following – at least up to Palm Sunday entry. But the crowds saw only the wonder worker & healer.

They had attached their label to Jesus as uninvolved spectators – not in personal encounter. They could dispose of his claim upon their lives. But now Jesus asks his own inner circle – those who had been closest to him – past three years. They had witnessed all the events at first hand & so now the question **has** to come – *‘But what about you – never mind what others think, suggest, & speculate – who do YOU say I am?’*

An awkward pause perhaps – disciples looked at their sandals maybe – but not Peter – he jumps in with both feet ***‘You are the Christ of God.’***

This confession takes us right back to Luke's introduction to the mysterious 'Theophilus' – Luke's orderly account of all that had happened, ***'so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.'***

And Peter **is** certain – at **this** moment in **this** place & in response to **this** question, Peter is the first recorded disciple who 'gets up out of his seat' & makes a commitment to Jesus Christ. Here we are reminded just what Luke (+ other three) are writing – all in their own style – subtle differences of emphasis & detail – but all are GOSPELS – about the Good News of Jesus Christ – so that we in reading & hearing it, may also **believe**.

So when was this moment for YOU in your life?

How many can recall that point in your life this a.m. when you too realised Jesus was asking YOU the question he asks Peter here & you responded as he does.

I could take the microphone 'Jeremy Kyle' style right now and walk around the congregation, asking the question 'but what about you?'...

I don't think too many of you would thank me for doing that!

But, straight after Peter's confession of Christ it is now that Jesus predicts his forthcoming passion, suffering, death & resurrection.

If anyone would come after me then he must deny himself, take up his cross daily & follow me. As Lent begins again this week, so we too are on the way with Jesus - making discoveries on the way, discoveries about Jesus & discoveries about ourselves & our own discipleship. (Ian's challenging Word a week last Sunday morning).

We are entering the season of Lent – of self-denial – of discipline & just like Peter here, sometimes we'll 'get it right', this following the way of the cross affair & sometimes we'll get it wrong & instead of self-denial, we'll deny him.

'I tell you I do not know the man!' [Visit to Church of Peter in Gallicantu in Jerusalem]. And we shake our heads & tut, tut – poor old Peter – all those good intentions begun here ***'You are the Christ of God.'*** How could he do it?

But Peter – the Rock upon which Church was to be built – is also you & me is he not? The Church individual & corporate – seeking by faith the way of denying self & sometimes doing just that.

But sometimes too come those times of denying Christ – in word, thought or deed & sometimes all three & more besides! Following straight on from confession, we find discipleship defined here by Jesus.

Five 'dimensions' of Discipleship – five 'Ds':

Discipleship is a matter of **DECISION**, ***'If anyone would...'*** School assembly' hymn – *'once to every man & nation comes the moment to decide...'*

Back to the question - Do you recall that moment in your own life...? (For me back to 1981 & **READING of John 1** in Nursery School Christmas service).

Couldn't just walk away after exploring Christian faith over several weeks (led by Minister) with cross section of people -say '*Thank you very much, very stimulating, lots to think about...*' etc. etc.

I HAD to RESPOND & say '*Yes – I believe...*' A number of people here this morning have had just that experience, in recent weeks/months...

But, if not reached that point yet – maybe, just maybe, this forthcoming season of Lent 'pre-Easter' could lead to you knowing power & presence of risen Jesus in you...

Discipleship is a matter of (1) **DECISION**,
> (2) a matter of **DIRECTION** '*..come after ME...*'

As much as I enjoy '**facebook**' -yet to sign up to **Twitter**... But for those who do, can choose to follow all kinds of people...**QUOTE MOST FOLLOWED** 'tweeters'...cf **my 172 fb friends!**

No of Christians in the world? **2.18 billion** – nearly one third of world's pop.

From this point in Luke 9 where Peter says '**You are the Christ of God.**' to 2.18 billion...

'Christianity does not mean reciting a creed, it means knowing a person'.

Discipleship is a matter of **DECISION**, > a matter of **DIRECTION** > (3) **DENIAL**, '*he must deny himself*,' ...

Not easy! In our human DNA – to 'look after number one' – self preservation. '*The Selfish Gene*' – Dawkins.

First Date – man spent first 20 minutes telling his female table mate all about himself. But after 20 minutes – he paused, looked across the table & said to her, '*But that's enough about me – what about you – what to YOU think about ME?*'

Traditionally, **LENT** = the season of self-denial – of 'giving up...' chocolate, smoking, alcohol, cake, Eastenders, TV...'

The **Gk** word for 'deny' here..'aparneomai' = 'disown/renounce...' *'leave out of consideration one's own advantage or convenience'*...Christian counter cultural challenge – to the individual Christian & Church that is the Body of Christ...

> (4) **DEATH** '*take up his cross daily*' - Luke in his Gospel adds the word 'daily' – dying to self – not just an 'one-off' moment, but an on-going, daily challenge.

'Taking up our cross daily' will mean different thing to different people – including those here his morning. And some 'crosses' may seem heavier than others(House Group sharing..).

DEVOTION '*and follow me.*'

Not a set of rules...

'Devotions' – file on computer – years & years of Church Meetings, Deacons & Elders meetings – ALL of them started with a 'Word' + prayer – as here in Wade St. 'Devoted' to JC.

DECISION > DIRECTION > DENIAL > DEATH > DEVOTION...

Lent – we too are called to follow Jesus – all the way - to Jerusalem > Gethsemane > Golgotha & Garden Tomb > ultimately Glory. Lent – not so much about 'giving up' something – but taking up – our Cross - along **His** Way.