

**St Peter's Anglican Church, Bundoora**

**17<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost**

**Sunday 15/09/2024**

**Reading Wisdom of Soloman 7:26-8:1 / Ps 19:7-14/ James 2:18-26 / Mark 7:27-38**

(Readings are from New Revised Standard Version)

**Sermon Theme: *Knowing someone.***

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### **Wisdom of Soloman 7:26-8:1**

<sup>26</sup> For she is a reflection of eternal light,  
a spotless mirror of the working of God,  
and an image of his goodness.

<sup>27</sup> Although she is but one, she can do all things,  
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;  
in every generation she passes into holy souls  
and makes them friends of God, and prophets;

<sup>28</sup> for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.

<sup>29</sup> She is more beautiful than the sun,  
and excels every constellation of the stars.

Compared with the light she is found to be superior,

<sup>30</sup> for it is succeeded by the night,  
but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

<sup>1</sup> She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other,  
and she orders all things well.

### **Ps 19:7-14**

<sup>7</sup> The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul:  
the command of the Lord is true,  
and makes wise the simple.

<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the Lord are right,  
and rejoice the heart:

the commandment of the Lord is pure,  
and gives light to the eyes.

<sup>9</sup> The fear of the Lord is clean, and endures for ever:  
the judgements of the Lord are unchanging,  
and righteous every one.

<sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold:

sweeter also than honey,  
than the honey that drips from the comb.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them is your servant taught:  
and in keeping them there is great reward.

<sup>12</sup> Who can know their own unwitting sins?:  
O cleanse me from my secret faults.

<sup>13</sup> Keep your servant also from presumptuous sins,  
lest they get the mastery over me:

so I shall be clean, and innocent of great offence.

<sup>14</sup> May the words of my mouth and the meditation

of my heart be acceptable in your sight:  
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

### **James 2:18-26**

<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith. <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. <sup>20</sup> Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith without works is barren? <sup>21</sup> Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. <sup>23</sup> Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness', and he was called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? <sup>26</sup> For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

### **Mark 7:27-38**

<sup>27</sup> Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' <sup>28</sup> And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' <sup>29</sup> He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' <sup>30</sup> And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. <sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.' <sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup> Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

### **SERMON.**

Who do you say Jesus is?

Jesus' disciples are undergoing a very intense apprenticeship with Jesus, and it is about to get far more intense. As they prepare to journey south to Jerusalem, Jesus pauses near the northern city of Caesarea Philippi, and asks his disciples; "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27).

This is a relatively easy question. The disciples simply report on the buzz they have heard among the crowds. Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others, one of the prophets.

Jesus' ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing does indeed resemble that of the great prophets of Israel. While the responses are not far off the mark, they do not quite get to the heart of the matter.

So, Jesus asks his disciples a more pointed question: "And you, who do you say that I am?"

Peter, typically the first to speak, declares, "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:29). While we know that Peter has given the right answer, it is in his context not actually very logical.

The title "Messiah" in Hebrew or "Christos" in Greek was associated in Jewish tradition with an anointed king, a royal figure from the line of David expected to come and free Israel from their Gentile oppressors, purify the people, and restore Israel's independence and glory.

Nothing in Jesus' career up to now has given any indication of claims to royalty or political ambitions. He has made no claim to be the Messiah, and he certainly has shown no interest in a fight with the Romans. Perhaps Peter hopes that when they go to Jerusalem, Jesus will finally take on this messianic role, *...as Peter understands it.*

As soon as Jesus begins to speak of what is to come in his career as Messiah — rejection, suffering, and death — Peter is quick to try to set him straight. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. We can imagine him saying, "No, no, Jesus,

this is not the way it is supposed to go. The Messiah is supposed to conquer the Romans, not get killed by them. What good is a dead Messiah?"

Perhaps that is why Jesus tells his disciples to tell no one about him, because he knows that they are still so far from understanding what he is all about.

We cannot be too quick however to judge Peter. His response is understandable in light of Jewish messianic expectations, which are perhaps not so very different from what we want in a Savior. We want someone who is strong and powerful, someone who will rescue us from our troubles and defeat our enemies. Too often in popular evangelism, Jesus is presented in this way — as a kind of superhero who solves every problem for us, as a guarantor of prosperity and success. Nothing could be further from what Jesus has in mind.

Jesus' response to Peter is harsh: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (Mark 8:33). This is one of those moments in Scripture that highlights the vast distance between us and God. Though Jesus is God with us, we cannot tame him or make him over into our image.

We would like a Savior who is a winner, and one who makes us winners, but Jesus insists on identifying with the lowliest of losers. He will allow himself to be judged and condemned as a blasphemer by Jewish religious leaders. He will allow himself to be mocked, tortured, and executed as a criminal by the Romans.

And that's not all. Jesus actually expects his disciples, expects us to follow him on this path of suffering and death. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

Here I think it is important to be clear about what Jesus means by taking up the cross. He is not talking about the suffering that is simply part of life in a broken world — everything from annoying neighbours to serious illness to natural disasters. Neither is he telling us to seek out suffering or martyrdom. Jesus himself did not seek it, but he foresaw that it would be the inevitable outcome of his mission.

Jesus speaks of losing our lives for his sake, and for the sake of the gospel.

Taking up our cross means being willing to suffer the consequences of following Jesus faithfully, whatever those consequences might be. It means putting Jesus' priorities and purposes ahead of our own comfort or security. It means being willing to lose our lives by spending them for others — using our time, resources, gifts, and energy so that others might experience God's love made known in Jesus Christ.

How can we possibly do this?

Our instinct for self-preservation fights it at every step. In this sense we are no different from the first disciples. They certainly tried to save their lives. Though Jesus tried to prepare them for what was to come in Jerusalem, they all deserted him.

And Peter — that star student who had the right answer — he not only ran away, he denied three times that he ever knew the man named Jesus.

We might wish that things had happened differently, that Jesus had followed a more dignified, Messiah-like path, and that his disciples had been more heroic, but that is not the story we have before us. What we have before us is a story about a Messiah being tortured and killed by the powerful and abandoned by his closest companions.

Yet Mark has announced from the beginning that this story is good news (euangelion)<sup>1</sup>. How can this be?

We need to read the whole story, to be sure. The whole story tells us that Jesus was faithful unto death, even while all around him proved faithless, and that God raised him to new life. Because of this, we know that God's life-giving power is far stronger than the worst that human hands can do. Because of this, we know that there is no sin or failure so great that it can finally separate us from the love of God in Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Strong's Greek: 2098. εὐαγγέλιον (euaggelion) -- good news ([biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com))