**Matthew 16: 13 - 20.**

There is a question in todays gospel which it is asked by jesus, it is addressed to the disciples but I suggest he is in fact asking all of us too.

Who do you say that I am?

First of all let me tell you some of the answers I’ve heard or read.

My personal Lord and Saviour. The Son of God. God incarnate. He’s my life, the song I sing, my everything. My Buddy, My brother, My friend. My Rock, My comforter, My coach. My Teacher. My Example. The copilot next to me.

The list could go on and on.

At some time or another we’ve probably all been told who Jesus is. Maybe you heard it from priests, teachers, parents, friends, in prayer groups or bible study of some sort, or even on the tele.

Maybe you saw it on Facebook, read it on the internet, or heard it in a song.

Some of the answers you have heard may have been helpful.

Some probably were not.

Some may have been just plain silly and some may even have been hurtful and destructive.

Regardless, Jesus’ question remains.

By now I think most of you know me well enough to know that I don’t intend to answer that question for you.

I can’t. Each of us must answer it for ourselves. It is not, however, a theology question or Bible exam. If anything it is an examination of ourselves.

I don’t think Jesus is asking us to just repeat back the answers we’ve heard or read.

Maybe that’s why he pushes the disciples to move from what they were hearing around them – John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets – to what they were feeling within themselves.

“But who do YOU say that I am?”

This is not an easy question, and I wonder if we sometimes too readily accept and settle for “Sunday Jesus” answers.

You know, the easy, feel good, sentimental ones.

The problem is life isn’t always easy, doesn’t always feel good.

It’s one thing to say who Jesus is here in church, on a Sunday morning, in relative safety and comfort.

It’s a very different thing to say who he is outside of that. Because the question is never merely academic or abstract. It always has a context.

Here’s what I mean.

• Who do we say Jesus is when we see the racial tensions and conflicts in our country and in the world?

• Who do we say Jesus is when Corona virus ravages our world, our community our friends and family?

• Who do we say Jesus is when a loved one dies, the doctor gives news we did not want to hear, or our life seems to be falling apart?

• Who do we say Jesus is when we are faced with decisions that have no easy answers, when the night is dark and the storms of life overwhelm us, when faithfulness may mean risking it all and taking a stand against a louder and seemingly more powerful majority?

• Using the context of these few examples, what does it mean to say Jesus is my personal Lord and Saviour, my example, or my brother and friend? What does it mean to say Jesus is my life, the song I sing, my comforter?

What I think I am trying to say is who we say Jesus is has everything to do with who and how we are and will be.

It guides our decisions, it determines the actions we take and the words we speak.

Jesus’ question isn’t so much about getting the right answer as it is about witnessing and testifying to God’s life, love, and presence in our lives and the world.

It is less about our intellect and more about our heart. It is grounded in love more than understanding.

It moves us from simply knowing about Jesus to really knowing Him.

There is no once and for all, finally and forever, answer. We are always living into the question.

Who Jesus was to me when I was a child is different from who he was when I was in my 30s or who he is for me today.

It’s not that Jesus has changed. I have.

We are constantly engaging with his question and in so doing we not only discover Jesus anew we discover ourselves anew too.

Sometimes we discover a disconnect between the “Sunday Jesus” about whom we sing, sometimes, and talk for an hour, and the life we live the other 167 hours of our week. Our words and actions don’t always align.

I don’t say that as a judgment about anyone but in acknowledgement of just how difficult it can be to recognise and live the truth that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

More than once I have fallen into the gap between my “Sunday Jesus” kind of answers and the realities of my life and world.

Sometimes my answers were too simple, too small, too easy. They were no match for the complexities of life and the pain of the world.

At other times my life and actions have not reflected what I said about who Jesus is. Sometimes I kept quiet when I should have spoken up, or I was passive when I should have done something.

Whenever I have fallen into that gap it has usually been because I was trying to play it safe. That almost never works.

There is nothing safe about the question Jesus poses. How could there be?

There is nothing safe about Jesus or the life to which we calls us.

Jesus’ life and presence among us calls us to question everything about our lives, our world, the status quo, and business as usual.

That’s why we ought not answer his question too quickly, too glibly, or with too much certainty.

It’s not really a question to be figured out as much as it is a question to be lived.

Think about it, and how you answer for yourself.