

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?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

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. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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." 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. 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 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." *Mark 8:27-38*

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'Who do people say that I am?' asks Jesus.

Our names are important to us. We all have a name: Nikki, Suzie, Rachel, Richard, Rose. Our name was chosen with care and after much thought and deliberation. We are baptised by name and God knows and loves us by name.

Jesus was also known by his name. His reputation spread far and wide. Yet it is clear that whilst those who flock to listen to him know his name, they don't understand who he is. The people of Israel were expecting a Messiah, a Messiah who would defeat the Romans ushering in a new era of God's rule. But Jesus is not this sort of Messiah. Jesus is a Messiah who will usher in a new era of God's rule not in triumph but in adversity. Jesus is to suffer, die and rise again. No wonder Peter is struggling; no wonder he blurts out the wrong thing.

In his book, 'Jesus and Peter',¹ Bishop Michael Perham writes: 'Peter is follower, disciple, evangelist, witness, friend; and as such he is exemplar and encourager. But he is also exemplar and encourager by his human weakness, by his frequent failure to understand, by his habit of saying just the wrong thing, by his struggle, even by his denial. We are drawn to him, inspired by him, because in him so much remained for a long time imperfect and unresolved.'

Peter knew Jesus by name but it took him a long while to understand who Jesus was. The starting point for this discovery was their friendship. St Gregory of Nyssa writes: 'the one thing truly worthwhile is becoming God's friend.' May we encourage one another to grow in our friendship with Christ.

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¹ Michael Perham, *Jesus and Peter* SPCK 2012 p110