

Sermon Notes for 23 August 2020 - Matthew 16:13-20

Knowing Jesus

- Hard to overestimate the significance of this incident at Caesarea Philippi - for Jesus, the disciples and the church.
- Peter knows Jesus for who he is.
- The people got it half right when they identified Jesus with the OT prophets and John the Baptist - Jesus was in the prophetic tradition, calling everyone back to God, challenging accepted principles.
- Peter's identification goes well beyond that - Jesus is Messiah, God's anointed one, who will transform the life of the Jewish people. In Jesus' time this meant throwing off the Roman yoke and implied military leadership.
- But Jesus needed to reinterpret what Messiah meant.
- Peter's insight might be compared with that of Charles Wesley's conversion experience after years of devout practice as an Anglican priest. His heart was warmed and he knew Jesus.
- Peter had a long way to go (via the ultimate shame of denying Jesus) but he had started. And Jesus already knew all about Peter and his potential to be the Rock. Arguably Peter's and the other apostles' hearts were not really warmed until Pentecost.
- What does this mean for us? We probably know a lot about Jesus. But do we know him in the sense of having an active relationship with him?
- How might our hearts be warmed? By spending time with Jesus, having our hearts and minds open to the prompting and direction of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus talked a lot about the Kingdom of Heaven and how near it is to those with faith.
- A recent example is John Hume, the Northern Ireland peace activist who died recently; accused by a journalist of being relentlessly optimistic in his assessment of reality he said, "Always tell the people that what you want to happen already is happening. Then you can be sure it will happen." A very Jesus-like comment.
- Just as peace did come to Northern Ireland, however unlikely it seemed, so the Kingdom of God is just around the corner if we believe it to be so. Our lives and the life of the world will be transformed if we look for the signs that it's already happening.
- Our hearts will be warmed if we are ready for them to be.
- Then, like Peter, we will know Jesus for who he is, and not just know about Jesus.