

This is the second of our series of sermons exploring the creeds:

Last Sunday Alan encouraged us to consider what it means to believe in God the Father.

This week we are looking at Jesus, specifically through the statement

I believe Jesus is God.

“I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord” we say when we speak out the Apostles Creed

“I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of Very God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father” - the belief that Jesus is God is asserted with more detail as we speak it out in the Nicene creed.

A few weeks ago I was walking along residential roads in Norwich.

Many of the front doors sported a notice – someone in Norwich is doing good business with their range of door stickers – here are a few examples -

“This is a no cold calling zone”

“ We are not interested in unsolicited sales, services or religious fanatics!”

And, a little more polite.....

“Thank you but, we have insurance, are happy with our windows and have found Jesus.”

I held myself back from an urge to ring that doorbell and share an Alleluia!...

..reflecting later, I realised I could have usefully done some research for this sermon, had I been brave enough to doorstep it and ask

“Who do you think Jesus is?”

Imagining myself into the conversation I encountered some “why & what” questions.

- Why do I believe Jesus is God?
- What difference does it make to me that Jesus is God?

- Why is it important for me to confidently proclaim that Jesus is God?

The Church of England's Pilgrim Course is introduced with these words:

“The truth about Jesus is the truth of a relationship.....It's about getting to know Jesus , so the question “who is Jesus?” is right at the heart of things. “

There is substantial historical evidence that Jesus lived, as a person on this earth, during the relevant timeframe, (more from Chris about this next week?) but, the question remains, what gives me the confidence to proclaim him God?

The evidence is found in scripture:

There are clues in the prophecies of the Old Testament – It was Isaiah who prophesied the birth of the child who would be called “Mighty God, Everlasting Father”

further on he writes :

“How beautiful on the mountain are the feet of those who bring good news....when the Lord returns to Zion they will see it with their own eyes... The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.” (52. 6-9)

I can't help but be taken right into the gospel accounts of the transfiguration of Jesus by these words: a deeply personal moment of witness for three disciples, who see Jesus transfigured in glory on the mountain top, conversing with Elijah and Moses about his act of salvation.

It must have reminded them of Peter's answer to Jesus' question eight days before

“who do you say I am? “

-Peter's reply, “you are Christ.”

For Peter, a moment of clarity, despite his future faltering.

A moment which, I am sure, later gave Peter the strength to take up the authority designated his by the resurrected Christ.

The Gospels give us evidence in a range of ways, - Matthew tells of the magi kneeling to worship the infant Jesus (2,2-11),

And the recognition of Jesus' power in the calming of the storm, (14.33)

Luke recounts recognition from others:

The centurion who seeks healing for another, "Lord, only say the word and my servant will be healed." (7:7)

Mark recalls this question from the high priest,

"Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am" Jesus' replies. (14:61-64)

In John's Gospel we witness the Jewish leaders and teachers make ready to stone Jesus when he states: "before Abraham was born, I am."

The term "I am" was a clear signal that Jesus was claiming to be God.

It is an identity repeated through-out John's Gospel .

Jesus' opponents refused to see God at work in his actions, they could only hear a serious act of blasphemy in his words.

In our Epistle reading today (Colossians 1, 15-18) we hear an unshakeable statement of this belief - that Christ is the visible image of the invisible God, living creator of the universe, holding all in his supreme power.

Paul's letter leaves the Christians in Colossae no doubt that their wisdom and insight need come from one source only – Jesus Christ who is the way to God, because he is God.

Here is clear evidence, from a man who once vigorously persecuted Christian believers for their so called "blasphemy." Yet, after a personal encounter with Christ's transforming power, Paul now firmly and widely asserts a different truth.

It is a truth that leaves us with puzzles to ponder -

If Jesus is God, why did he need to pray?

If Jesus is God, why did he die on the cross?

That question was being asked even as he breathed his last –

“You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself” (Mark 15, 29)

Those hurling such insults, and the Leaders who encouraged them, felt threatened.

Even today some feel threatened by the idea that Jesus is God, finding it easier to recognise a Good-man, but struggling with the concept of a God-man?

Why is this?

Is it because Jesus falls short of our expectation of God?

Is it because it is easier to relate to someone who reflects our own image, rather than relating to a greater, unseen image to which we can hardly aspire?

Is it because, in acknowledging Jesus as God, our capacity for faith is challenged – it’s a step too far,

or a greater authority is recognised, - to which we will we inevitably fall short?

C.S. Lewis wrote passionately on the matter:

“Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” —C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

How do we reconcile that Jesus is God with Jesus as a human being?

This is a question that has been grappled with since the emergence of Christianity. In Maureen Lipman terms, -it has it’s own “...ology” – Christology. .

Theologian Alistair McGrath describes Christology as “one of the perennial tasks of Christian theology” and cites the Council of Chalcedon in 451 as the pedagogue for establishing a controlling principle on the matter –

And this is the important bit -

The recognition that both identities can, and should, be held in tension with each other.

Since then the question has been explored in a range of ways, too many to go into this morning. This is not to dip out, there’s no place for “so what” on this question, it’s just that there is a more critical question to consider, which is:

What difference does it make to know and to profess as a core belief, that Jesus is God?

John’s gospel records Jesus praying at that last supper

- “and now Father, Glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

As his prayers continue he intercedes on behalf of all believers.

“...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you have sent me.”

To believe and profess that Jesus is God speaks of the heart of his divine desire for all people:

That we should be in close relationship with God;

so close, that we can know his love directly and his grace abundantly.

To know Jesus is God means that we can start every day with that certainty – that we are known intimately; loved unconditionally; and live in abundant grace.

Arthur Michael Ramsey, 100th Archbishop of Canterbury and a respected theologian once wrote:

“The importance of the confession “Jesus is Lord” is not only that Jesus is divine, but that God is Christ-like.”

I find this a really helpful framework through which to think about this.

If God is Christ-like, then he knows what it is to be human.

If God is Christ-like, then it is he who has sacrificed himself for each one of us.

If God is Christ-like then it is he who has sought to save us from sin.

If God is Christ-like then his power is healing, forgiving, transforming.

If God is Christ-like then he meets us in prayer, not only receiving our prayer, but praying for us.

And if Christ is God-like, then we have all the more reason to come before him with worship and praise -, not in his image as human, but seeking to reflect his Glory– and not only in our worship, but also in ourselves and the way we live.

If Christ is God-like, we have all the more reason to seek his power in our lives, to open ourselves up to his transformation.

If Christ is God-like, we have all the more reason to respond to those words

“ Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching”

- To respond with loving obedience, through the choices we make, the life we live and what we do in relationship with others.

-

Had I knocked on that door in Norwich, I wonder what the response to my question would have been.

If whoever lived there had truly found Jesus, I think we might have acknowledged together that

- We believe Jesus is God, because the evidence in scripture, repeatedly and overwhelmingly tells us so, especially in the words of Jesus himself.
- That knowing Jesus to be God makes a huge difference to the way we live our daily lives, how we relate to one another and especially how we relate to God himself.

- And that it is critical that we confidently proclaim that Jesus is God.

If we don't, we short change Jesus;

If we don't, we short change ourselves;

and we short change others, who may never know how amazing, unconditional, immense and everlasting, is that invitation to know love and grace in their lives , as we know it in ours.

Knock knock....alleluia....Amen

Sue LawrenceLLM. 17/03/19