

Sermon at Caldy Church by Canon John Bowers
on Sunday 23rd. August 2020 11th Sunday after Trinity
Bible readings Matthew 16:13/ 20 & Romans 12:1/8

Caesarea Philippi, North Galilee has long since vanished from our maps, but not from our Bibles. Christians warmly remember the fantastic event that took place there as our Lord Jesus paid His visit as recorded in this morning's Gospel.

Jesus asked His disciples to enquire: "Who the people thought He was? Their response was polite. You might say typical of what many would answer today. Jesus then turned His question to His disciples; and asked "Who do you say I am?" in a flash, Peter proclaimed "You are Christ, the Son of the living God." The reply we all love to make!

Jesus knew that it was God Himself who had put that answer into Peter's heart and lips, and said, "You are Peter the rock, on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Wonderful assurance from our Lord Himself, The church is not here to-day and gone tomorrow, it is permanent! When I was a curate in Brromborough, in 1963, I remember looking down from the pulpit at all the elderly people and thought, what would be the situation in a few year time? I needn't have worried, that church still strives, and will continue to do so. It is for each of us who are committed to Jesus, to encourage friends and neighbours to know something of the joy of knowing our Lord and His church. We have resolved sincerely, to serve our Lord Jesus, but we need to keep reminding our selves of our absolute desire to love and serve Him completely. We don't need formal words any more than when we are expressing our love to another person. On the other hand, we have made a formal commitment to Jesus in our Confirmation or at some other very special time in our life .The Creed reminds us of who it is we believe and serve .On the night of our Lord's initial trial when Peter was in the courtyard warming himself, three times he denied knowing Jesus. Then the cock crowed, and Peter wept bitterly he was absolutely devastated. How could he cope? Then a few days later when Jesus had risen from the grave, He appeared to a group of His disciples. Jesus called the repentant Peter and three times said words of forgiveness concluding with "Feed My sheep" And Peter spent the rest of his forgiven life doing so most faithfully.

The words Jesus spoke early His ministry in the presence of Nicodemus "God did not send His Son into the world to be its judge but to be its saviour" A wonderful promise to us all.

It's not often that the Epistle and Gospel of our weekly lectionaries are complementary to each other, as today's are. St. Paul in his Letter to the Christians in Rome reminds us to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice pleasing to God in response to God's mercy, this forms part of our worship, a renewal of our mind. We are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. He reminds us that each individual comprises many parts, and each part has its own purpose, each of us, as members of Christ, have a relationship with each other, we are in fact brothers and sisters together with our Lord Jesus. And whatever gifts, abilities, we have are to be of use for the benefit of all.

Let us think for a moment of the gifts, abilities, listed by Paul, and with God's help, use them but only if it is meant for us. We are to look for opportunities for a smile in return, it cost nothing to encourage someone in what they are doing. Think of the encouragement footballers and other sports folk, those on the stage, what a difference can make. Then there is generosity. As Christians we know our financial responsibilities and are taught planned giving. Then there are always emergencies at hand. My heart goes out to those suffering from the plague of locusts sweeping across 30 African countries, the years crops cleared and we must pray and perhaps support their need in the name of Jesus, to whom we confess "You are the Messiah, Christ, the Son of the living God"