

Jesus anticipated by about 2000 years our fascination with our history and ancestry, as exemplified in the BBC TV programme *Who do you think you are?* You've probably seen it, but it usually revolves around a celebrity tracing back their family with visits to ancient cousins, and if they're lucky, some trip abroad. I think the best ones are when a family member connects a widely-known and often tragic event with a private experience, for example the Jewish Holocaust. A secondary pleasure I admit to is to enjoy either their disappointment that a long-lost relative is not a national hero, or the bemusement / embarrassment that Uncle Andrew was a scoundrel.

The Gospel writers are keen to answer the question that was on the lips of the first disciples, and the same question which justified the early Christian communities for whom they were writing: Who is this Jesus? And a second allied question: is Jesus the Messiah? We had some of this last week in the Gospel reading from Mark after Jesus had quieted the storm on the Sea of Galilee: Who is this that the winds and waves obey him?

In Matthew's account, almost immediately before this exchange about identity, Jesus has performed the miracle of feeding four thousand people with a minimum quantity of loaves and fish. Matthew has Jesus himself prompting the questions about identity, initially slightly obliquely referring to himself as Son of Man, and then more directly speaking about himself: Who do you say I am? Simon Peter answers without equivocation that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, and in colloquial language, the cat is now out of the bag. What this means is that the rest of Matthew's account of the life of Jesus, and especially of his death and resurrection, is deliberately shaped by this assertion. There can be for Matthew's readers no doubt that this Jesus is the Son of God.

Whatever that phrase or title means in more detail, I would imagine that we are here this morning because we essentially agree with it, or at least want to examine that meaning sympathetically. As soon as we do this, we arrive at a question like: Who is this Jesus for us or for me now? Irritatingly perhaps I am not going to supply an answer, not least because you have to do the work if the answer is going to mean very much. But I am going to offer some pointers towards a method. Traditionally, we meet Jesus in Word and Sacrament; in other words in reading the Bible, particularly the Gospel stories and Paul's Letters (of which more in a moment), and in participating in the Church's sacramental life, especially the Eucharist. One challenge outside this Zoom service is how much time we spend on reading and meditating on our Bible privately. A second, and perhaps greater challenge, is how well we know ourselves, either individually or in terms of our local community; we can't really explore Jesus' meaning for us unless we know 'us' quite closely. It's as if Jesus is putting back to us the BBC question: So who do you think you are? The story of Jesus is then interwoven intimately into our own stories. This is hard work, but rewarding nonetheless.

We celebrate St Paul as well today. In the same framework of identities that I have just used, we might say that Paul's letters (to the Churches of Rome, Corinth, Ephesus as so on) are the apostle saying to them: Who do you think you are as a Church? And so he directs them to think through their various positions and problems. And if Paul asked us the same question now, to this Church of St Thomas, to the Church in Devon, or our Church of England. What would the answer look like? Your creative homework is write a letter as if from St Paul to any of those three: St Paul's Letter to the Church of St Thomas, to the Church in Devon, to the Church of England. What would you say? What would he say? You don't need to share it. Amen