

Get Real

Sunday 28 June 2009
Rev Brian Senior

Readings:

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Matthew 16:13-27

Sermon

On your tables are some colouring sheets.

The idea is that you choose one colour to colour in all the shapes which have a dot in them ... then use any colours you like to colour in the other shapes. Parents can help ... or do their own ... but please try to be quiet and listen at the same time!

So ... Michael Jackson is dead.

I know that might come as a shock to some of you ... at least all those who have been hiding in a cardboard box with your fingers in your ears since last Thursday ... but for those of us who have been paying attention, we could be forgiven for thinking that nothing else of any importance has happened since then ... anywhere in the world.

So what have people been saying about him? .

- that he was a genius
- that he was a spectacular performer
- that he was the consummate entertainer

But the man who has been called the "King of Pop" was also known, less flatteringly, as Wacko Jacko ... and the last few years of his life have consisted of a series of disasters ... increasingly bizarre behaviour ... suspicions of child abuse ... spiralling debt ... accusations of drug dependency. It doesn't add up to a very pretty picture.

He was described on the news on Friday evening as "brilliant, charismatic and deeply troubled" ... but Uri Geller, who was a friend, said simply that he was "a very lonely man."

I wonder if we will ever know the *real* truth.

The way some people have behaved it seems they have treated Michael Jackson almost like a god. If only people would Get Real about him, they would have to recognise that he was just a human being with an unusual talent, but with the same weaknesses and temptations which all of us face, and who made some bad choices in his life.

You see, what other people think of us and say about us does matter ... and Michael Jackson certainly discovered that to be true, since the rumours and gossip perhaps more than anything else destroyed him ... but much more important than what other people think and say, is what is the *real truth* about us.

So this morning we continue our series in Matthew's gospel, looking at what it means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Two weeks ago we looked at Matthew's own salvation story in 'Count Yourself In' ... and how this despised collaborator and Tax Collector's life was transformed by meeting with

the Lord Jesus Christ. We thought about the open invitation which God offers to all people, whatever their background, their history or their circumstances, to receive forgiveness of sins and a new life in Jesus Christ, and so to come into his kingdom as children of God.

Last Sunday, when Morgan, Cameron and Emily were baptised, Karen spoke on the theme of "You need to get out more". She reminded us that, as disciples of the Lord Jesus, we are called in order to be sent ... and we thought about how coming together as Church is meant to equip us and prepare us to go out into the world in order to live for Christ, and speak for Christ.

We took note of God's promise to empower and guide us as we step out in faith to share the Good News ... to build the Kingdom of God in our own time, by telling our faith story to those we know who have not yet met Jesus ... and how he promises to be with us even when we face opposition or even persecution.

So today our theme is "Get Real" ... and is an opportunity to consider not only what it cost Jesus to put us right with God, but also what it will cost us to choose to follow him. If we are to Get Real about our faith, then we do need to understand that there is a price to pay.

Matthew 16 is an incredibly important point in the gospel story. It marks in change in what the disciples understood about Jesus, and in what they understood about being his disciples. Jesus asked them:

"Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ... but which he meant: *"Who do they say **I** am?"*

So what was the reply?

Responses

People had all sorts of views about Jesus. Some thought he was wonderful, and others thought he was dangerous. Some wanted to follow him, and some wanted to get rid of him. Jesus always has caused divided opinions, and he still does today.

But the truth is more important than opinions ... so Jesus asked:

"But what about you? Who do you say I am?"

Now ... how are you getting on with those colouring sheets?

Have we discovered what they say, yet? *'Jesus is the Son of God'*

I hope you will take these home and put them on the fridge, or somewhere you can see them every day, so that none of us forget who Jesus really is.

So ... this is what Simon Peter answered when Jesus said: *"Who do you say I am?"*

He said: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."*

What an amazing thing to say? Had Peter known for ages, or maybe guessed? ... or had God only then shown him the truth? We don't know!

But Peter got it right! He had come to understand that Jesus was no ordinary man ... not even just a wise teacher of a powerful worker of miracles. Peter understood that Jesus was indeed the Son of God ... the promised Messiah who would set people free.

I expect Peter was really pleased with what Jesus said to him then:

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

... and Jesus went on to tell Peter about the important job he was going to do in the future.

Simon Peter was beginning to learn to hear the voice of God ... he was growing into a mature disciple ... he was going to be a leader in the Church after Jesus had returned to his Father. Lots was going well for him ... but look what happened next!

Now that the disciples understood more about who Jesus was, now was the time to Get Real with them about the future. Jesus began to tell them about the things which were going to happen to him ... how he would suffer when they got to Jerusalem.

They didn't want to hear that he was going to be arrested, and put on trial ... still less that he would be sentenced to death and crucified ... and Peter took Jesus aside and said:

"No, Lord! ... not this! We can't let this happen to you."

What Jesus said to Peter then seems pretty harsh: "*Get behind me Satan!*" ... but we need to remember that Jesus was a *man*, with human fears, facing a terrible death. He still knew what had to be done, but the last thing Jesus needed right now was someone suggesting there was a way out. The temptation might just be too great.

Poor Peter ... he had been so sure of being right .. and now he was getting it all wrong! Instead of looking at things through God's eyes, he was looking at it through human eyes. But aren't we just the same? ... wouldn't we have thought the same way?:

'Jesus can't die ... surely this can't be right?'

When we Get Real about Jesus, we also need to Get Real about ourselves ... and really we are just like Peter. Peter had reached a High Point: "*You are the Christ!*" ... and now he had messed up – just like we do!

We thought earlier about when we find it easiest to be a Christian ... and when we find it hardest. Sometimes we do so well ... we know that God is with us and we are doing our best to live for him ... and then suddenly something happens to us and we stumble and fall. We forget how much we are loved ... we doubt the reality of our faith ... we let God down and we wonder if he can possibly still love us.

But God knows what we are like ... he understands our weaknesses. Peter crashed, and Jesus rebuked him ... but he still loved him. Only six days later Jesus took him with James and John up the Mount of Transfiguration to show them his glory.

Maybe you feel you're not bad at living the Christian life on Sundays, when you have everyone else around you to help you ... but its another thing altogether on Monday morning at work. Or maybe you feel that being a Christian at work is OK, but *Church* can be the hardest place, because we are all supposed to be loving and forgiving as brothers and sisters in Christ, but sometimes it can be very difficult.

Some people find that home is the hardest place, because at home we let our guard down, and people can easily see us at our worst ... when we are tired and grumpy, or selfish or ungrateful.

Either way, I suspect that none of us are good at living positive, obedient, faithful

Christian lives all the time. I'm sure we all have times when we know we have let God down.

Does it matter? Of course it does! We are called to live the whole of our lives for Jesus! But God doesn't give up on us when we mess up, any more than he was going to give up on Peter ... he has called us to be disciples of Jesus – lifelong learners who need to be corrected and guided and shown the way.

He is always ready to forgive us ... to restore us ... to take our hand and lead us so that we can get back on course, following his way, living our lives for his glory. We just need to Get Real with him about our weaknesses and struggles, and to trust in his love.

There is another aspect of Getting Real which comes out of this passage. Jesus said to his disciples (Matthew 16:24f):

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."

Now what does that mean? ... that there is a cost to following Jesus. When he talks about 'taking up our cross', Jesus reminds us that it won't always be easy to be his disciples, but we have a choice ... to choose to live his way. The truth is that sometimes following Jesus involves suffering and loss and sacrifice ... and we need to be real about that.

We are very privileged in this country to be free to worship Jesus, and free to tell others about him. There are many parts of the world where people are imprisoned, tortured and even killed for their faith. Many of you should have received an e-mail I forwarded on yesterday about Arshad Masih, a 37-year-old Christian who is locked up in a Pakistani jail after police broke his backbone, beating him up because his father was preaching Christ.

We don't have to face that kind of suffering, but it can still be costly to be a disciple.

You may have seen in the news this week about Rev Jim Field, a Romney Marsh Vicar who has had £20 000 of lead stolen from the roofs of two of his churches. He said: "I know as a man of the cloth I shouldn't be asking for heads on stakes, but that is what I think."

That may seem a bit harsh ... and I don't think Jim really meant it ... but bear in mind that in his previous parish Jim had his Vicarage deliberately burnt out, and lost everything.

Then there is a good friend of mine, a Vicar in this Diocese, who two weeks ago was woken at 2am by the noise of her car being fire-bombed on the drive ... the eleventh incident at the Vicarage in the last three years.

Thankfully that sort of thing is not too common, but it reminds us that there is a price to pay. Following Jesus means laying down our lives in his service ... putting Jesus first ... making him our priority ... choosing to do what he wants more than what we want. Not everyone will love us if we choose to follow Jesus ... and some will actively oppose us.

But it is a price worth paying, because to know Jesus and to serve him is the best thing of all ... and he, after all, gave up everything for us ... even dying on a cross. He has promised that when he comes again in his Father's glory, with all his angels, then he will reward each person according to what he has done ... and we will live with him forever.

Read Nick Fawcett "No ordinary man" p 91: 25 - "It was a wonderful moment"

Make a paper cross - write on it how *you* need to take up your cross - and pin to the cross. It may be something simple like "Telling my friend about Jesus" or giving up something which you know is wrong ... or doing something for God which costs you time or money.

Whatever it is, it needs to be something which helps us to Get Real with God.