



## All Saints' Thornton Hough Sermon

### Mark 8:27-38

Three challenges from Jesus that make us look again at our lives.

#### **Know who Jesus is**

There is no shortage of opinion these days. Yesterday we had the election of a new leader for a political party, and a demonstration in the streets of London to support helping refugees. And of course we had another instalment of the X Factor with the panel of judges and the public voting in.

But public opinion is not always right. People can choose things for the silliest reasons, and great crowds can get swept along with some very bad ideas. When someone always has to buy the latest things just because people think they look good, we call that person a "fashion victim." In the end, you need to make up your own mind about things and not just follow the crowd.

About two thousand years ago, Jesus lived on earth. And the public opinion about Jesus was wrong. They knew he was powerful and compassionate but the crowds didn't grasp who he was. As it says in verse 28 of our reading, some people thought he might be John the Baptist (coming back from the grave), or Elijah (a new version of a great hero from the past), or one of the prophets (someone with a message from God). But the truth was that Jesus was the Christ: this means he was unique, one of a kind, with a mission from God to bring salvation into the world. He wasn't just great; he was the greatest.

People today still need to know who Jesus is. You do, and I do, and the people living around us do. There are lots of people who imagine Jesus to be special, different, important, and good. But public opinion falls a long way short of realising just how special Jesus is. He is unique and he commands our respect and obedience, and gratitude because of what he did for us.

#### **Think how Jesus thinks**

This challenge came as a surprise because it was Peter, a close friend and disciple of Jesus, who was challenged by Jesus. It's as if you're in school and the best pupil in the class, who always gets top marks, has just given an answer that is really, stupidly wrong. What the disciple Peter said seems at first to be very sensible. Jesus was becoming more and more successful, healing people from their diseases and teaching in a powerful way. And then Jesus said to them (verse 31) that he would have to "suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed." This really didn't make sense to Peter and the other friends of Jesus. Why would Jesus have to suffer; he had done so much good? And being rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law; that's a bit like being expelled by the head teacher, or it's like a famous person being condemned in a public enquiry. Why should Jesus be rejected and condemned? Why should he be killed?

Peter said what most brave friends would have said: (paraphrase) "No, Lord, we won't let that happen. Don't worry Lord, we are by your side. You can count on us. Your success will be greater and greater."

But Jesus challenged Peter, because Peter wasn't thinking the way God wanted him to. It was actually God's purpose for Jesus to be rejected, suffer and die, and Jesus was going to do it willingly. When Peter resisted that suffering, he was not doing God's will but without realising it he was actually working for God's enemy, Satan.

We need to learn to think how Jesus thinks. Unfortunately we are always being told to do whatever makes us happy. But sometimes God calls us to do things that will be hard, and sad, and painful. If we are going to think the way Jesus thinks, we must say, "Lord God, may your will be done." In every situation that he leads us into.

### **Live how Jesus lived.**

It's one thing to have the right ideas. It's another thing to put them into practice. The good news is that Jesus did follow through. He endured the suffering and rejection, and died on the cross. And when he did that, he paid for the sins of the world, and made it possible for us to be forgiven by God for all we've done wrong. He opened up a gate for us into heaven. When he died, it looked like Satan had won, but in fact Jesus had defeated him. And, said Jesus, anyone who wants to be Jesus' friend and disciple must be prepared to follow that same journey. Everyone's life is a different story, but as Christians we know that our story will at times involve suffering and rejection, and for many even death.

Verse 34 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." This is not really about your aches and pains, or trouble with the utilities companies. This is about following Jesus even when you are going to suffer for doing it. For example, if you live the way Jesus lived, you will use a lot of your money (which is really God's all along) for helping others; not to be congratulated, but just out of love. So you won't have that money to use for cars and holidays. If you live the way Jesus lived, you will stand up for people who are being gossiped about and bad-mouthed; as a result, you might be less popular with some people but it's the right thing to do. If you live the way Jesus lived, you will not be ashamed of him or the church but will look for opportunities to tell people the wonderful message of life and peace that can only be found through Jesus; it is hard work and may affect your reputation, but it's a small price to pay for being a friend and disciple of the greatest man who ever lived, who died for your salvation.

Three challenges from Jesus: know who Jesus is, not just special but unique, and worthy of our respect and worship. Think how Jesus thinks, not shying away from suffering and not complaining, but submitting to God's will for your life. And live how Jesus lived, putting into practice whatever he taught us to do and living in a way that shows God's truth and love to the world around.