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ANGLICAN PARISH  
ST. LAURENCE IN LANZAROTE

## LIVING ROOM SERVICE #4 - SERMON

### ***'But who do you say that I am?' (Matthew 16: v 15)***

In the Gospels, Jesus is always on a journey. Those who accompany him often do not understand where he is going. Yet they are drawn to keep going, to join their life to his and to share on that journey. When it however comes to the moment of most intense challenge, even most of his closest followers will turn away. But in the snapshot of time that we see in today's Gospel, the journey is in full flow, gathering momentum as people all around are questioning who this Jesus really is.

You can imagine debates around dinner tables. Could he have been Elijah, whom the Jewish people believed would come again? Or one of the other prophets? Or is he just a mad rabbi, leading people astray with his charismatic personality?

Then we hear Jesus turn the tables on the disciples as he asks them what the people are saying. This is turned into the moment of truth when he says: never mind what other people are saying – what about you? Who do YOU say that he is?

They have listened to parable after parable; they have seen him even walk on water; so who is he? This Jesus who has come into their lives and turned everything upside down?

It is Peter who answers. Who actually knows if Peter has been sure of this for a while, or if it is just at this very moment that the light dawns for him? Who knows what courage it takes for him to say the words? Scripture never gives us that sort of detail. It gives us the bare bones of truth and invites us to respond as we will. Peter's statement is simple and clear:

### ***'You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.'***

It's a turning point, a step of faith that opens up a new path. Jesus' words point to the future, when God's Church will be built upon that 'rock' of faith that Peter, for all his weaknesses, has become.

And St Peter is a rock, a rock that is solid enough to provide the foundations for Christ's great work that is the Church.

How could Peter or his faith be so great? This is the same Peter who in last week's Gospel wanted Jesus to send away the desperate Canaanite woman because 'she keeps shouting at us'.

This is the same Peter who had tried to walk on water and almost drowned – and Christ said to the same Peter '*You of little faith, why did you doubt?*'.

This is the same Peter who in the week before that was among the disciples who wanted to send away the crowd and let them buy food for themselves.

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This is the same Peter who seems to get it wrong constantly. He later denies Christ three times at the crucifixion – and then after the Resurrection Christ has to put the question three times to Peter – *‘Simon Peter, do you love me?’* and then Christ calls him with the words *‘Follow me.’*

Poor Peter gets it wrong in so many ways – he trips and stumbles constantly. He often gets it wrong, even later on in life. He gives the wrong answers, he comes up with silly ideas, and he easily stumbles on the pebbles and stones that are strewn across the pathway of life.

But eventually, it is not his own judgement, his own failing judgement that marks him out as someone special. No. It is his faith, his rock solid faith.

Despite all his human failings, despite his often tactless behaviour, despite all of his weaknesses, he is able to say who Christ is for him. He has a simple rock-solid faith, summarised in that simple direct statement: *‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God’*.

Peter has become the great symbol of unity in the Church by using his authority in the service of unity.

This work of unity is something that can be seen practically in the second letter of Peter, where he gives a reminder of the truth of the Gospel:

*‘But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, and you are called to proclaim the good news of Him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.’*

Let us each become the living stones, those who believe, with a rock solid faith immovable and steadfast. United – and let that work of unity be something that can be seen practically at work today. Peter functions as the great unifier, the one who holds the different factions together, the one who is the first in the defence of those who have received a mission from God to spread the Gospel. He lives up to his new name; he truly is a rock.

Let us strive with every fibre of our being for that same faith.

**Amen**