

**SERMON AT HOLY COMMUNION (BCP) AT 8.00 AM AT ST JAMES' CHURCH, YARMOUTH, AT HOLY COMMUNION (CW) AT 11.00 AM AT THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL, SHALFLEET AND AT HOLY COMMUNION (CW) AT 6.00 PM AT ST AGNES' CHURCH, FRESHWATER BAY ON SUNDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2018 (10<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY) BY JAMES COOK**

**Readings: Ephesians 4.1-16 and John 6.24-35**

**Title: 'Who are you, Lord?'**

**Aim: To help us understand who Jesus is.**

“Why Daddy? What’s that Daddy? Who’s that Daddy?”

When our children or grandchildren are very young, their questions seem incessant. They are challenging, sometimes irritating and often exhausting.

Yet we are sad when they grow up and stop asking such questions. Perhaps they think that they now know all they need to know, or maybe they seek answers elsewhere. Such fears are often ungrounded and arise because we also have stopped asking questions and we settle for the easier path of just making assumptions.

The great author and journalist Kipling, who died in 1936, wrote:

I keep six honest serving-men  
■(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
■And How and Where and Who.  
I send them over land and sea,  
■I send them east and west;  
But after they have worked for me,  
■I give them all a rest.

Today, I am leading services in three different parishes that are among the eleven comprising the ‘Emerging Mission Community’ of West Wight. Together, we are learning what this new formation means, in terms of working together with other Anglicans and with our fellow Christians of other denominations, on this side of the Isle of Wight. There are significant uncertainties but also many encouraging signs of goodwill.

As we learn together, I suggest that, with courtesy, good humour and persistence we employ Kipling’s six honest serving men and thus ask each other ‘What, why, when, how, where and who?’ In this way, we may receive fresh understanding, confidence and joy in serving God, each other and the wider communities in which we live and work.

Written by, or as if by, the Apostle Paul, the Epistle to the Ephesians provides guidance on how to work together as new Christians in exciting and challenging times. By employing Kipling's journalistic enquiry method to Ephesians 4.1-16, we can gain valuable insights into how best to work together in our new Mission Community.

How are we, for example, to behave towards each other? 'With all humility and gentleness,' says Paul, 'with patience, bearing with one another in love.'

What unites us? "One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all," says Paul. Our retiring Archdeacon, Peter Sutton, likes to add to this list 'One Island', and I find that helpful.

In today's Gospel Reading, we find Jesus allowing others to ask him questions and we see him teaching these people through his replies. I wonder, how often do we encourage people to ask us questions that would open up discussion about our relationship with God and with each other?

The Bible often describes the people who approach Jesus as 'the crowd', that is a multitude of the common people. This particular 'crowd' had been among the 5,000 whom Jesus had just fed miraculously. They were looking for more; but it seems they were uncertain about what that 'more' might be, and so they asked questions.

Where was Jesus and where were his disciples? We read that those who wanted to know got into boats and went to the coastal village of Capernaum. It was here than Jesus had healed many people, and it seemed a good place to start looking. If you or I are seeking a closer relationship with Jesus, where do we start? The best place to begin is often among those people who have been blessed by Jesus.

‘When did Jesus arrive?’ asks the crowd, for they had not seen him arrive and they were puzzled. When did you first sense the presence of Jesus? When have you sensed that God is very close and real to you? These are probing questions that oblige us to face up to spiritual realities. They are the kind of thing that ministers are asked when they apply for ordination training or for a new post. Perhaps we should sometimes ask ourselves and each other such questions.

Jesus uses the ‘when’ question to challenge the crowd about their real motives in asking. Are they seeking him out in the hope of more food for their bodies, or are they concerned for their spiritual life and their eternal destiny?

Why do we want to be part of the Christian Church? There’s nothing wrong in enjoying the sense of belonging and well-being that we find here, but is that all? Are we interested in having a deep and lasting relationship with the living God?

Some people in the crowd ask Jesus, “What must we do to perform the works of God?”

Jesus answers; and his reply to the question ‘What?’ still applies today: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” The ‘where, the when and the what’ are important, but ‘the who’ – ‘the whom’ – is vital. Jesus is the one God sent and it is believing in him that is key to our spiritual, our eternal life.

The crowd asks, “What sign are you to give us then, so that we may see it and believe in you? What work are you performing?”

Jesus replies by telling the crowd how he is to fulfil God’s purpose in sending him to the world. Just as God provided manna – bread from heaven – to feed their ancestors in the wilderness, so, in Jesus, God provides for us the ‘true bread from heaven’ – bread that ‘gives life to the world’.

The crowd responds, I suspect not fully understanding the significance of what Jesus offers them, with “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Kipling’s serving men have told us something about the ‘when, where, how, what, whom and why’ of an encounter with Jesus, but let’s ask ourselves one more question.

Why did Jesus come to earth as bread from heaven to give his life upon the cross?

I think John gives us the answer in chapter 3 verse 16 of his Gospel: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only son...' What do you think?