

How do we describe who we are? I had lunch with a friend this week and we were reflecting on the many issues which face us at present. The ongoing pandemic, the social and political inequality that has been made clearer in the face of this, systematic changes which are required in how we deal with each other in the world. To be honest, half way through lunch I lost my appetite, there is so much to face and no easy answers.

But as we were reflected we also talked about the role of faith in this conversation. Which lead to a discussion about where our hope comes from in such times; and then how we tell the story of such hopes. How we describe the story of our life is a gift. How we reflect on our experiences and pain we encounter. How we record why we are the people we have become.

Sometimes the story we tell of the choices we make reflect not where we started or even our intention; rather they reflect where we find ourselves in that moment. And often in our telling we fail to notice where God is at work, or even question where God is in the story of our lives.

Today our scripture readings invite us to consider the consequences of the stories that we tell – and God's role in them.

The first section we hear from Romans 12 today in essence is a summary of the proceeding chapters. Paul is writing an apologetic – that is a defence for what he sees - as the presence, work, and callings of God on the entire human family. Readers are called to live a countercultural lifestyle, moving from the life of flesh to a life formed by the Holy Spirit. Because he is writing to those under the Roman Empire, Paul persuades Christian communities living in the imperial centre to live not according to the political ideologies of Rome, but rather to live out faith on the basis of what God did in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>.

The stories Paul shares then reflect this imperative – they are seeking to challenge the status quo which sees some as property and others as outsiders. While some of Paul's writing may be challenging for us, his heart and his storytelling are in the right place. He wants this new community to live differently, to not assume that the way that it has always been is the way that it should be now. It is one of the reasons that the sentence 'when we return to normal' is a dangerous one. What power imbalances does the 'normal' promote – and where is God in the story of normal.

When we tell our stories, when we share our lives – do we look for the signs of God's action – do we remember to consider where God is at work in our collective experiences? We come to understand who we are, and who God is by in many ways, but one way is noticing where God is our current experiences. We see a glimpse of this in our Gospel reading too as Peter affirms that Jesus is the Messiah.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=4563](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4563)

When Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah he has images of political independence for his people. Behind Peter's hopes is a political expectation that Rome would hand back authority to the one true power<sup>2</sup>.

When we consider Jesus identity, I wonder what hopes we attach to it. Do we, like Peter attach an expectation that God will bring us to political justice and power?

Do we even take time to consider where God is in our context, in our expectations – and what do we then do when our expectations are not met?

One of the key parts of this gospel passage is the fact that Peter has courage, at this point in time, to name Jesus as the Messiah, and not be afraid of it. In time he will go on to completely misunderstand what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, But for now..., in just this moment, he confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. And that's something for which to give thanks and not to just dismiss because we know how the story ends.

It is also a lesson for us too! Like Peter in this moment – part of our story needs to be the times that we recognise who God is, and where God is.

But in doing this, we need to remember this is not the end, it is just part of the journey we are on – and while we may be able to name who God is, we like Peter may misunderstand what that will mean for each of us.

The power of Peter's confession is that in this moment it gave strength and courage to the community. A courage that empowered them in the weeks that were to follow. Our stories should also do the same as we have the courage to name God in our journey this week. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2020/08/pentecost-12-a-not-by-flesh-and-blood/>