

## Who are you?

[Matthew 16: 13-20](#). [Romans 12: 1-8](#)

At this time when we must all wear face coverings in shops and public places, we have become very conscious of how much we learn about someone from their face and how difficult that can be when a third of their face is covered. It's hard to "read" people's expressions, and for those who suffer from hearing impairments, lip-reading becomes impossible.

Sometimes we have to adopt a "public face" in a professional capacity, appearing to be calm and assured when inwardly we feel anything but. Top-level sports people adopt a "game face" when they are about to go into competition, focusing their attention on their tactics and freezing out the opposition. And who is going to win a high-stakes card game if they don't keep up their "poker-face"?

But who are you *really*? Going beyond the face, what is in your *heart*?

Jesus gets to the heart of this when he asks his disciples who they think he really is.

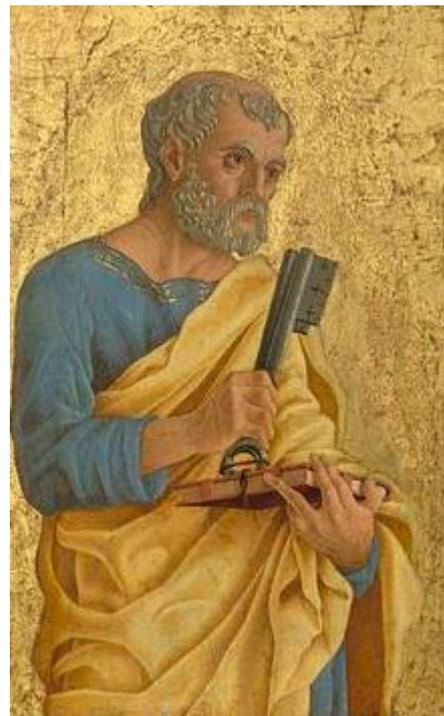
Going beyond public opinion and gossip, beyond the layers of expectation which others have loaded on him, Jesus asks them what they think.

I wonder if the disciples were like an awkward group of students at that point, shuffling in silence and glancing round one another to see who would possibly step forward and say something, or whether they were hoping that Jesus would answer the question for them. What would happen if they got the answer wrong?

Peter confesses his belief and trust in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God", and at that point something amazing happens.

In that moment when the Holy Spirit fires through him and he recognises Jesus' true identity, so his own true identity and purpose is revealed. He is transformed from being simply "Simon, son of Jonah", the fisherman, to Peter, the solid rock.

Peter's life story is rocky in many other ways, however. His outspoken, rash, enthusiastic and flawed character is one which lands him in difficulties on many occasions. This rock of a man denies Jesus three times before his crucifixion.



Have you ever played the game “scissors-paper-stone”? In the rules of the game, scissors beat paper, stone beats scissors, but paper beats stone – because it can wrap it up. There’s a flaw in this scheme, however. A sheet of paper might well be able to wrap up the stone, but beyond the bounds of the game, if you leave paper and stone out in the weather for any length of time, which one survives?



Jesus sees beyond the paper wrapping up the stone: he shows Peter his true identity and potential.

Our reading from Romans goes on to give us a vision of our true identity as both a gathered church, but also as individuals. If we put our trust in Jesus and allow ourselves to be “transformed by the renewing of our minds”, we can be true gifts to one another and to the world.

What is our true identity? Whilst we all gather in our Christian faith, we all bring different expressions of that faith. There is no hierarchy between the gifts mentioned; prophecy, teaching, service, encouragement, helping meet others’ needs, leadership, mercy. What is important is the way in which they are exercised: proportionately, generously, diligently, cheerfully. It’s a picture of joy and balance. All that variety is held together in love and in conveys a powerful message – showing the face of Christ to the world at large.

As we begin to meet again in church and also look to our Annual Meeting and PCC elections, are there gifts which God has given you to bring to help our whole church body grow stronger and more able to show others the love of Christ? Do please ponder on that, and consider how you can respond.

There will be times when we struggle with our faith or perhaps our enthusiasm leads us to do or say things which, on reflection, we shouldn’t. Yet, if we confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, the Son of the Living God, he will be with us and help us to be who we really are.

### **The Collect for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity**

God of glory,  
the end of our searching,  
help us to lay aside  
all that prevents us from seeking your kingdom,  
and to give all that we have  
to gain the pearl beyond all price,  
through our Saviour Jesus Christ.

**Rev’d Vicky Barrett**