



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 12 September 2021

Pentecost 16

We gather today to contemplate what it means to respond to Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" with "You are the Messiah". This is a pivotal moment on our journey from Easter to Christmas; a journey we make for ourselves and for our world.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"Who do people say that I am?" *Mark 8:27*

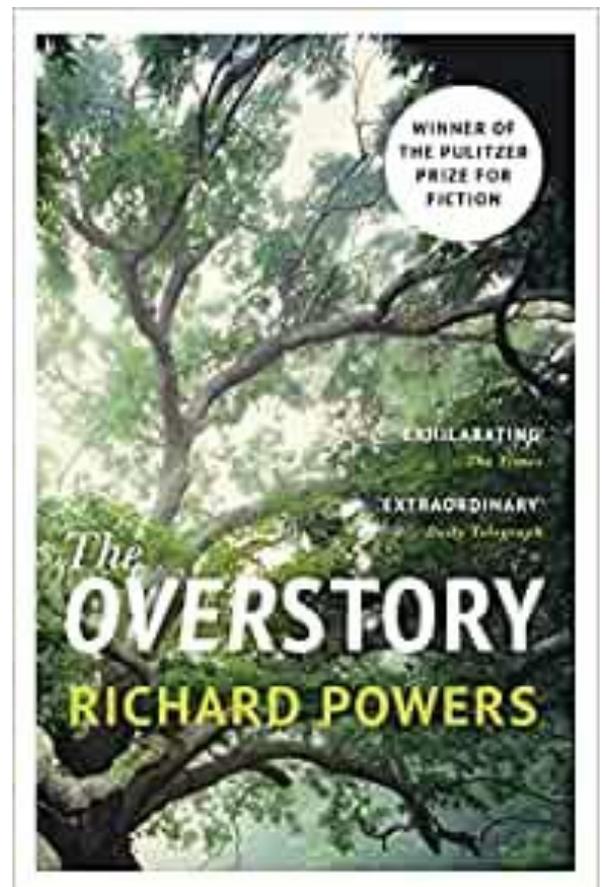
An Illustration to set the scene

Richard Powers, in his novel *The Overstory*, depicts the incredible being that each tree is.

Set in America, campaigners are trying to protect the last of the redwoods.

Powers describes the deep interrelationship between the trees, the immensity of their majesty – and the speed at which they are cut down.

A campaigner sets this challenge: *"Never cut anything down which is not going to be used for something at least as valuable"*.



Over the other side of the world, in Indonesia, tribal people are weeping.

Whether tricked, threatened or exploited, they sold their rainforest land to a palm oil company.

The money is gone, promised jobs pay little and the rainforest no longer exists to provide them with food.

A tribal leader said, ***“It was our supermarket, but one where we did not have to pay.”***

The selling of their beautiful, rich and diverse land for money hangs heavily on their consciences.

They have managed to get a halt on further forest clearance while investigations are held.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Just before today’s Gospel reading, Mark describes how Jesus performed miracles, demonstrating who he is.

He fed crowds with a few loaves;

he restored sight to a blind man.

Now he asks the disciples, **“Who do you say that I am?”**

For Mark this is the pivotal moment of Jesus’ ministry.

Everything has been leading to Peter’s declaration: **“You are the Messiah”**.

However, to Peter’s shock, Jesus’ messiahship will not bring glory and power.Instead, Jesus turns towards Jerusalem, where he will suffer, be rejected and be killed.

Only then will he rise again.

Today’s readings make it clear that following the Messiah is not about going the way of the world.

In one of today’s choices of Old Testament reading, the writer of Proverbs teaches that wisdom is rooted in **“the fear of the Lord”**.

People are warned against killing innocent people and taking their belongings to fill their own homes with nice things.

Abandoning the way of God will bring only short-term gain.

When we need God in a calamity we, in turn, will find ourselves abandoned.

In today's alternative Old Testament reading, the prophet Isaiah speaks of how God's servant will not be glorified but will suffer.

When we turn to our second reading James, (writing to an early church community), describes the damage we can do by what we say.

Our tongues are so small yet, like the rudder of a ship, can direct our course for good or ill.

James vividly describes the contradiction of speaking blessings while cursing others, which is like the impossibility of a spring pouring from its mouth both fresh and salty water.

We have to choose.

Jesus' teaching that the Messiah has to suffer turns the idea of messiahship upside down.

So too Jesus turns upside down what it means to follow him.

It is not an easy option.

We have to give up our own lives, even go as far as to take up our cross.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

“Who do you say that I am?”

If we answer *“You are the Messiah”*, it changes our lives.

Whether we're tribal leaders being offered quick money in return for our land or palm oil company directors, what we do has to be seen through this filter.

Is what we do in each decision, every action, acceptable to God?

If we are cutting something down, are we using it to make something that is at least as valuable?

Or are we, as the writer of Proverbs put it, *filling our houses with booty stolen from those who are innocent?*

When we open our mouths, do we speak as Christ would, **words of forgiveness, of acceptance, of openness to sinners**, or *do our words divide people and encourage discord?*

Answering “You are the Messiah” involves a commitment, a turning upside down of our priorities.

But if we choose this path we have the promise of the steadfast love of God.

Having lost our life we will save it.

Jesus teaches that he will suffer and die, **but** on the third day he will **rise**.

“Who do people say that I am?” *Mark 8:27*

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’ spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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