**Who Was Jesus? Revd Dr Calvin Samuel**

Who was Jesus? If we are ever going to answer that question, we really have to spend some time looking at Jesus’ ministry and his manifesto. Let’s start with the manifesto.

In Luke chapter 4 Jesus begins his ministry by going to the synagogue, finding the scroll, finding the place in Isaiah and reading these words – a very short sermon – where he says, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” And then all he does for this sermon [is] to say, “today, this has been fulfilled in your hearing” and then sits down. That manifesto is what Jesus then goes on to do for the rest of his ministry. So much so that later on, when the disciples of John the Baptist come to Jesus just to check whether he is indeed the Messiah, or perhaps just a naughty boy like Brian, what does he do? He says, “go back and tell John that the lame are healed, the blind receive their sight, the poor have the good news preached to them.” In other words, he refers back to this manifesto. And it seems to me if we are going to understand the way in which Jesus sees himself, understands himself as Messiah, we can only get to that through his ministry and mission which is shaped by this manifesto. Which brings us, then, back to the question of ministry.

So, what does Jesus do in this ministry? How does he engage? Well there are three or four things which really set out Jesus’ ministry. The first is his healing ministry. Jesus spends a great deal of time healing people. Particularly in Mark’s gospel for example, where there is lots and lots of activity, Jesus touches a leper and he is healed; Jesus casts out demonic spirits; he touches, or is touched by a woman who has an issue with blood; he raises a dead girl back to life and so on and so forth. He spends quite a lot of time healing.

The second element is the teaching element, and a lot of time in Jesus’ ministry is spent teaching – most significantly through parables; he tells quite a lot of stories. But most of all, he wants to teach about the nature of the kingdom. And so his healing and his teaching are, if you like, two parts of the coin, showing something of the nature of the kingdom of God. Ultimately, of course, he teaches most fundamentally through his actions on the cross. He demonstrates something of both his devotion to God and of God’s devotion to us by offering himself on the cross.

I think the third element is to do with Jesus’ miracles. Jesus’ miracles are not limited to healings. There are a number of other miracles which are ‘nature miracles’ – you might describe them as. Perhaps the best known of these is the stilling of the storm or walking on water – that kind of thing. Things that are very, very difficult for us to explain or indeed, in some cases, to believe. But those miracles were really important because what they demonstrated was that Jesus was a step above your average healer. There were other people who healed. And he was a step above your average teacher. Some of these miracles – particularly things like stilling the storm – meant that you had to view Jesus in a very particular way, because you could not simply categorise him as just another person who happens to know how to make people better. This implies that this is someone who wields the very power of God. I suppose the ultimate nature miracle is to do with Jesus’ resurrection. That takes quite some doing – to come back from the dead and of course, that’s the way all of the gospels end; they end with this story of defeat, or at least apparent defeat on the cross, but then of course resurrection and victory that death is swallowed up in life and sorrow is swallowed up in joy.

So all of those things tell us something about Jesus. Let me say two other things which, I think, really put this into context, because when you put together this manifesto: ‘the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has given me good news…’ you then have that good news being expressed in Jesus’ activities through healing, his activities through teaching about the kingdom and in demonstrating his capacity to control nature itself. His hearers and the people who are recipients of his activities were forced to ask the question, who is this person? In fact they were asking the same question which we are asking now: who is Jesus? That was the question that the disciples asked at the end of the stilling of the storm: “who is this man that even the wind and the waves obey him?”

John’s gospel begins with the most amazing prologue where it doesn’t leave us guessing who Jesus is. It starts way back, not with narratives about Jesus’ birth which is where Luke and Matthew begin, but right at the beginning: “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John wants to say, if you go right back, this person that we encounter in the human figure of Jesus has a back story, and that back story is his being with God.

Mark’s gospel does a similar thing, not in quite as grand a prologue, but Mark’s gospel also doesn’t leave you guessing as to who Jesus is. It tells us pretty much right at the beginning: ‘this is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus, Son of God,’ and in case we haven’t got that message, if you look towards the end of the story, Mark chapter 15 verse 39 I believe, we have a Roman centurion who has just finished crucifying Jesus and when he saw how Jesus died he then says, “surely this man was the Son of God-” right at the beginning, right at the end, Mark wants us to know this.

Who is Jesus? The gospels it seems to me are fairly clear. Jesus is one of us – he is human – and that is evidenced by the fact that he is born as all humans are born and he dies as all humans die. But the gospels are also very clear that Jesus is more than that. Jesus is God’s only Son and indeed Jesus is God’s very self, and it is those activities of Jesus, through his healings, his teaching about the kingdom of God, in other words he knows something about the kingdom of God because he is a product of the kingdom of God. And, of course his control over nature – all of those things together – tell us something very significant about the nature of Jesus.

So his mission and his manifesto are the lens through which we are able to gaze into something about this Jesus that we find on the pages of the gospel.