

St Edmundsbury Cathedral



ST PETER & ST PAUL

29 June 2025

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Sermon by the Revd Canon Matthew Vernon

This morning, two stories. The first is the tale of Rabbi Yehuda who was the greatest Rabbi in Europe of his age. One night he had a dream. He dreamt he had died and was brought before the throne of God. The angel said to him, "Who are you?" "I am Rabbi Yehuda of Prague." "Wait here", said the angel; "I will read the names of all those who have died today that are written in the Book of Life." The angel read many names. But when finally he finished, Rabbi Yehuda had not heard his name. He wept bitterly. The angel said, "I called your name." "I did not hear it," Rabbi Yehuda cried. "Ah," the angel said, "every soul is an inheritor of the Kingdom of God. But many come here who have never heard their true names on the lips of humans or angels. They have lived believing that they know their names; and so when they are called to their share in the Kingdom, they do not hear their names as their own. So they must wait here until they hear their names and know them. Perhaps in their lifetime one person has once called them by their true name: here they will stay until they remember. Perhaps no one has ever called them by their true name. Here they stay till they are silent enough to hear the King of the Universe Himself calling them." At that moment, Rabbi Yehuda woke from his dream. He fell to his knees and prayed, "Lord God! Let me just once hear you speaking my true name through the lips of my brothers and sisters."

Jesus asked his disciples "Who do you say that I am?" We are asked the same question and its not a rhetorical or theoretical or just intellectual question. "Who do you say that I am?" is inseparable from "and what does that mean for your life?" - how do you respond?

Our lives can limit our awareness of God. Our lives, our work, our circumstance can prevent us from knowing God more fully. Like Rabbi Yehuda, clergy are particularly at risk: indeed any minister of religion, any religious professional. Jesus asks us all "Who do you say that I am?" "and what does that mean for your life?"

The second story. Once upon a time a farmer found a large egg. Not knowing it was an eagle's egg, the farmer put it in with his chickens. In due time the eagle hatched. The young eagle thought it was a chicken so lived on the ground, scratching around in the dirt. Every now and then the young eagle would look up to the sky and see a large, majestic bird soaring high above. Its heart would stir, but quickly that was forgotten and it went back to scratching around in the dirt with the other chickens. One day it looked up and saw an eagle soaring high above, its heart stirred and it asked one of the older chickens, "What's that?" "Oh," said the older chicken, "that's an eagle." "But don't worry yourself about that. "Us chickens are safe here on the ground where we are meant to live." But then came the day that the eagle's heart was strangely moved and an irresistible urge flowed through its body. The eagle stood up straight and flapped its wings. Its enormous wings instantly lifted it off the ground. Excitement coursed through its body and it beat its wings some more. Moments later the eagle had taken flight and was speeding up into the air. Now it knew that it wasn't a chicken after all. Away it sped, flying majestically, to discover its true destiny.

"Who do you say that I am?" and what does that mean for your life? Our answer and response evolve over time. It's not a once for all answer that is fixed once we learn it. The nature of faith is

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that your understanding and your response continues to grow and deepen. Sometimes this can be dramatic breakthroughs when you realise you've been scratching in the dirt and need to take wing. Discovering who Christ is an ongoing adventure. If Christ is who we say he is, how can it be anything other than ongoing discovery?

Teilhard de Chardin encourages us to trust the process. "Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability and that it may take a very long time. And so I think it is with you; your ideas mature gradually – let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what time, that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will will make of you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete."