

# A DIY Faith !

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) has recently taken off! Almost everything is now AI assisted. We don't know any more, whether any document is original work or fabricated by AI. In the past we had spellcheck and grammar check – we didn't have to know the correct grammar or spelling – now, the whole document is done for you!! It sounds like a terrific advance, but we are quickly losing the ability to put together a clear concise message on our own.

So, another skill is in the process of being lost, just like the ability to drive a manual car, parallel park, do mental arithmetic, or write in a flowing cursive script or have an intelligent conversation

Rather than a “Do It Yourself” age (DIY), we have entered the “Let someone else or a software program do it for you” age! So many skills gradually being lost!

Interestingly, when we come to our Christian Faith, it does really need to be a Do It Yourself Faith – a DIY faith.

Sure, we can be moved by wonderful music or a stirring sermon, or a wonderful Christian testimony from someone else. All these can be invaluable in leading us the Christ and showing us the way – but in the long run all decisions regarding our faith in God and Christian discipleship must be our own.

We cannot have a second-hand faith. Fanny Brice in 1921 and later, Barbra Streisand may have been “Second Hand Rose from Second Avenue” but we cannot be second hand Christian.

And this brings me to our lesson this morning. The interaction between Peter and Jesus regarding his own personal faith.

This Gospel reading today is entitled “Peter's Confession of Christ” where Jesus asks the disciples “Who do people say that I am?” and they reply “Well some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah and still others say “one of the prophets”

And Jesus says “But what about you? Who do YOU say that I am?” and Peter replies “You are the Christ”

Good old Peter, the big fisherman – the rambunctious one, the impetuous one.

- He is the one who jumps out of the boat when Jesus comes walking to them on the water.

- He is the one who cuts off the soldier's ear in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- He is the one who wants to build a monument or something when Jesus appears in dazzling white on the mount of transfiguration.
- He is the one who declares forthrightly "You are the Christ – the Son of the living God!"
- He is the one who denies his master with oaths and curses – not just once but three times.

Our Christianity cannot be a spectator faith. We cannot rely on the devotion of other people. Jesus follows up his first question with a second one "Ah yes but who do YOU say that I am?"

We can enjoy the great devotional music of Johann Sebastian Bach or Georges Frederick Handel or any other of the great musicians who dedicated their life and talents to the glorification of God. In similar vein, we can marvel at the great works of art inspired by the faith of the great painters such as Rembrandt. We can stand in awe of the architectural magnificence of the great cathedrals around the world, and be moved by the devotion and dedication of those who constructed them. We can be moved to tears by wonderful Christian stories – the stories of the great saints of old or even today – saints who gave up their lives for their faith and their God. We can bury ourselves in liturgy, or church organisation or mission outreach or good works – but always at the back of all our activities and crowds is Jesus saying "Yes but who do you say that I am?"

We can't ride piggy back on anyone else when it comes to our faith!

- Sure we can share and support each other
- Sure we can learn from others and from their viewpoints which may or may not be different from ours.
- Sure we can give and listen to grand sermons

But in the final analysis there is still that strange Galilean asking that question “Who do you say that I am?”

If one scrolls through the whole Bible one gets the strong impression that Christ is not just a good man or a mystic or just one of the many holy men who would wander the countryside in those times. From his claims, and his authority and deep seated wisdom he was more – much more. Peter replies “You are the Christ”. If we go to Matthew’s account of the same conversation Peter is reported as saying “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!”

Can we say Amen to that? And if so, what does it mean for us here today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I guess it is a very personal question for each and every one of us – and equally well we will probably reply in many different ways. But reply we must for this strange Galilean will not go away.

Yes it is a question for each and every one of us - and our reply will not be just words – our reply will be embodied in the very lifestyle we choose, the things we do and don’t do, the way we order our priorities and the messages we give to others by the way we live. Those things will be the true testament to our faith.

Finally, to come back to Peter. As Jesus said, he was to be the rock on which his church was to be built. As we know all the popes down throughout the ages have continued a succession starting with Peter. What an honour! And yet

wasn't this the same Peter who denied Christ three times. This wasn't a slip of the tongue or a moment's lapse. It was an outright and repeated denial accompanied by curses and swearing.

You know what is amazing, Jesus knew all this was to happen. He actually predicted that Peter would deny his Lord three times before the cock crew. Jesus knew exactly what a mixture Peter was; he could see the potential and he could also see the weakness and the frailty.

I have a soft spot for Peter because I can relate to him very much. We too make bold promises and have high hopes and expectations. And we too are human and weak and frail. And so often we must disappoint our Lord because we have failed to deliver. We too have denied our Lord – probably not in a cold courtyard around a fire waiting for a crucifixion.

- But maybe in our dealings with other people,
- Maybe at a social event,
- Maybe when we establish our priorities,
- Maybe when we overlook people,
- Maybe when we rationalise what we can and cannot do.
- Maybe when we decline to stand up for issues of honour in our community.

So many of the Biblical heroes were oh so human. David, Samson. Paul and so on. And of course we are the same. But God takes us on board warts and all and works with us to bring in his kingdom.

Charles Colson was former special assistant to President Richard Nixon and pled guilty to Watergate related offenses in 1974. He served 7 months in prison and became president of the Prison Fellowship located in Virginia. He died in 2012 and in his lifetime, he authored numerous books including the best seller "Born Again". Yes, he was weak, yes he was fallible and yes he paid the price for this weakness. But more importantly, yes God is continuing to build his kingdom with the help of the testament of Chuck Colson and his life.

Yes, just like with Peter, God knows our every weakness and yet still wants to continue building His church through us. He knows we are human and fallible. He also knows that we, just like Peter, can become strong, and bold and fearless through his strength.

Jesus is still saying Who do you say that I am? It is a question to answer for each and every one of us. This is our DIY faith.

Before I finish however, there is one important qualifier to add to all the above. Yes we need to acknowledge Christ for ourselves – but when we take that step we find that it is all done for us. Grace and forgiveness await us because of Christ dying on a bleak and anguished cross at Calvary. The prodigal son decided to come home, it had to be his decision, but once he had decided, his Father came running to meet him and there was a fatted calf, a feast and great celebration awaiting him.

Who do you say that I am? He is the Lord of life who has secured our salvation and eternal life, Praise be to him!

Amen.