

Our cook was absent on Thursday because her husband had been taken ill. She was back on Friday and I asked her how her husband was and received the wonderful reply, as she hurried in and out with the food, ‘What a palaver, such is life’ and thought what an English response, worthy of my own home town of Portsmouth noted for it’s speech being ‘rough, gruff and wry’, but then I thought ‘palaver’ isn’t English; in fact it comes from the Portuguese word ‘palavra’ and originally from the Latin “parabola” ‘comparison’ (see Parable) - as the dictionary goes on to tell me. And ‘such is life’ could as well be French ‘c’est la vie’, despite Portsmouth schoolchildren at the time of Brexit dismissing the French as those people who “speak funny”. Now you may be wondering where this meander is taking us (meander: from the Latin maeander, from the Greek Maiandros, the name of a river (see Menderes) noted for it’s winding course, a river in SW Turkey rising in the Anatolian plateau... and so on. I’m using parabolic language here just as Jesus is in today’s gospel passage and Peter in Acts and I also have the feast of St George in mind on Tuesday with it’s emphasis on St George as the patron saint of England – ignoring the fact that he is also the patron saint of several other countries too, including Portugal and was probably a Roman soldier murdered in the persecution of Diocletian. So, it’s all about “identity”. We get stuck with our present identity as English or whatever, or Roman Catholic or whatever, or white or whatever or male or female or whatever, when what is on offer in Christ is a far more fundamental understanding of who and what we are: *“Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God’s children.”*

When Peter identifies Christ as the keystone of our identity it’s not only in opposition to religious difference but to any other differences we might have – Christ is our foundation stone because he, in a sense, re-presents us to ourselves, to that original understanding of us as one in origin, a people made in God’s image and able then to give glory to God in that image but sadly now marred by sin – by that emphasis on difference, on self, that robs us of our true inheritance. Christ then comes to shepherd us back, to be with us wherever we are: day or night, out at pasture, inside asleep, with us because he is us restored fully to God. It’s not that difference doesn’t matter but that we can live with it knowing there’s a more fundamental unity at issue, underlying it, allowing it, making it possible. So, it is indeed all a matter of identity – the fact of being who or what a person or thing is – from the late Latin identitas from Latin idem “same”.

Or in the words of our hymn at Lauds:

This day our risen Saviour reigns

Creation’s undefeated king,

While angels in resplendent light

With mighty voice his triumph sing.

This day the Lord has made his own,

Who broke from his confining grave

His loving presence fills the world

. That by his cross he came to save.

To God the Father glory give

For Jesus Christ his deathless Son

Who with the Holy Spirit lives

Immortal and forever one. (Stanbrook Abbey)

And we are part of that oneness.

Br John Mayhead

Monastery of Christ Our Saviour