

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Pentecost 12A - Proper 16A
August 23, 2020
Matthew 16:13-20
Building on Rock

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:13-20 ESV)

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

We live in an age of identity confusion, don't we? People think they are (or can be) whatever they think they are (or want to be), regardless of the truth of the situation. So when Jesus asks His disciples what people were saying about Him, He's not trying to figure out who He is. He was fully aware of who He was. Still, when He asked the question, He received various answers, none of which were right. Some thought He was John the Baptizer come back to life. Indeed, this is what Herod thought. Others thought He was Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the other prophets come back to life. They thought Him to be a good man, maybe even a prophet, but no more than that.

Today, people don't think of Jesus much at all. But if they do, they often have wrong or misguided ideas about who Jesus is or what He would say or do. Rev. Dr. Matthew Richard has identified twelve such errors. Some think of Jesus as a mascot, an option among many, a good teacher, a therapist who can solve our problems and make us feel better, a giver of bling, a national patriot, a social justice warrior, a moral example, the new Moses, a mystical friend, or a teddy bear. (Richard, Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up). And most of these ideas are based on feelings and emotions rather than on God's Word. Perhaps you even think of Jesus in one or more of those ways.

When Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was, Peter, as he often did, answered for them all saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." Indeed, Peter was blessed because such a confession cannot be made unless or until the Holy Spirit has brought that person to faith and confession. St. Paul tells us, "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). We "were dead in trespasses and sins, . . . and were by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:1, 3). "Therefore . . . no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). So Peter did not confess something he had figured out on his own; he didn't merely express his opinion; rather he confessed what had been revealed to him by God. His confession is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Luther expresses this in his explanation to the third article of the creed: I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

Thus Peter's confession was true and remains true today and flows from God-given faith. Jesus *is* "the Christ, the Son of the living God." He is the Seed promised to Adam and Eve. He is the Savior promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is David's greater Son who was promised to sit on his throne forever. He is the Messiah prophesied by the prophets. He is the Lamb of God to whom John pointed. Jesus is no mere man, but He is the Christ, the Messiah, and He is the Son of God in the flesh. He is Immanuel, God with us, come to save people from their sin.

Having commended Peter for his confession and having revealed the source of that confession, Jesus declares, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." To properly understand this we must remember that Jesus, being very God, was, and is, a wise builder. Therefore, Jesus would never build His house, His Church, on the person of Peter, for Peter was like shifting sand. One minute he says or does the right thing, and the next he says or does the wrong thing. In our text, He says the right thing. In the verses immediately following our text, which we'll hear next week, when Jesus said that he was going to be killed and raised again, Peter rebuked Him. Jesus then said, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." Rather than being a rock upon which Christ would build His church, Peter had become a stumbling block to Jesus. Building upon the person of Peter would not allow for a house that could withstand the gates of hell.

So Jesus builds His church on the rock of Peter's *confession*. Jesus builds His church on the fact that *He* is "the Christ, the Son of the Living God." *He* is the sure foundation. *He* is the Rock upon which He builds His enduring Church.

In this way Christ *does* build His Church on Peter. For He here establishes the Office of the Holy Ministry as He gives to Peter, the Apostles (John 20:23), and the Church (Matt. 18:18) the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Through the use of these Keys the Holy Spirit creates and nourishes saving faith so that others may also confess that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." So the "called and ordained servants of the Word" use those Keys "on behalf of" and "for the benefit of" the congregation.

And what are these Keys? Simply the Law and the Gospel, the power to forgive sins or retain sins. For the unrepentant sinner, for the one who stubbornly refuses to repent of his sins, this Key binds and retains his sin and announces that he is no Christian and that he is hell-bound through His own fault. And this is never undertaken lightly for such a declaration is that of

Christ Himself. And the purpose is to show him the seriousness of his sin so that he might repent and receive absolution.

But for the repentant sinner, for the one who is sorry for his sin and seeks forgiveness, the Gospel key opens the kingdom of heaven. Through the forgiveness of sins in Word and Sacrament, the doors of heaven are opened. Thus Christ builds His Church upon His life, His death, and His resurrection.

And while this Church is being built, while it stands, it is subject to storms and attack. The Church is under constant attack by Satan and his forces. The Church is under constant pressure to conform to the world. She is under pressure to entertain rather than to proclaim God's Word and exercise the Keys Christ has given Her. Satan accuses us of our sins and tries to create doubt about God's love. He tries to turn one Christian against another. Satan would turn our attention to someone or something other than to Christ.

Yet, despite the onslaughts of the devil, the world and our own sinful nature, Christ's church shall stand. As the hymnist puts it, "Built on the Rock the Church shall stand / Even when steeples are falling. / Crumbled have spires in ev'ry land; / Bells still are chiming and calling, / Calling the young and old to rest, / But above all the souls distressed, / Longing for rest everlasting. (LSB 645). The Church Christ builds is not a building, an organization, or even a corporation. Rather, the Church Christ builds is people, repentant sinners forgiven for Jesus' sake.

And as the Holy Spirit proclaims this forgiveness in and through the Church, the Church is built and sustained through the storms which beat against her. The storms which beset her are never pleasant, yet, through them all, we have Christ's guarantee that the storms, even the forces of Satan and hell itself, will never cause her to fall. For Christ is the Builder of His Church. He has established Her on the rock of Peter's confession. The foundation is Christ Himself as He laid down His life on the cross so our sins would be forgiven. The foundation is Christ as He rose from the dead to guarantee eternal life to all who believe. And such faith is created and nourished through the Office of the Keys, as sinners are turned in repentance to the Rock of our salvation for the forgiveness of their sins.

With sins forgiven, Peter's confession is your confession and you are a part of the Church that Christ builds. Only with Christ as the foundation upon which your faith and confidence rest do you have the guarantee that you will live with Christ forever. And praise be to God that Christ has been revealed to us so that we too may confess with Peter, "You are the Christ the Son of the living God." To Christ be the glory now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener