Good morning, Family. It’s good to be with you this morning. In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus is with the disciples and He asks another question. Now, briefly, let’s be reminded that when the Son of the living God asks a question, it is not for His information. No, it is for our transformation. It is for our self-inventory, reflection, and benefit. Jesus has taken the disciples to Caesarea Philippi, a pagan region, an area and culture that worshipped Baal, Caesar, and the pagan god Pan. In Caesarea-Philippi, even today, tourists can see remains of Roman temples and the opening to a cave known down through history as the “Gates of Hades.” In the first century C.E., Pan was worshipped as the god of the wild, of shepherds, and flocks. So, ironically, in what better place can the Lamb of God, our Good Shepherd be recognized as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God?

 While in this Las Vegas of His time, Jesus’ questions truly reveal some important truths for us today. First, He asks, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13). The responses to this question, in the succeeding verse, reveal the importance of our not being influenced by what the world says about Him: “They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” These responses reveal the urgency then and now of sharing the truth about who Christ is to a misguided generation. People need to know the truth of who Christ is—not their version of who He is but the biblical, unchanging truth: Christ is the Son of God and the only way to Heaven. In this His second question there in Caesarea-Philippi, Jesus focuses on each disciple--and each of us--individually, personally: “Who do *you* say that I am?”(Matthew 16:5). Everything in the disciples’ lives and everything in each of our lives determines how we answer this question. How do you answer this question? Who do you say that Jesus is? The question is NOT who do you say you want Him to be, not who you want to portray Him to be, but ***WHO DO YOU SAY THAT HE IS?*** The answer to this question is a matter of essential doctrine. Peter’s answer is “You are the Son of the Living God.” Right there, in the midst of paganism, countless counterfeit gods, in the middle of a first century “sin city,” Peter affirms that Jesus is not just a prophet but THE prophet, not just a King but THE King, not just a priest but THE Priest! The Anointed One, the Chosen One!

 Church! Jesus is who He says He is. Who do you say He is? Do you identify more with Him than with anything else in life? What we believe about God matters. Our lives should reflect that more anything else in this world. Is there evidence of what you believe? This kind of belief comes only in one way—through salvation, through the transformation of the Holy Spirit. It comes with identifying with the Holiness of Christ more than with the church to which we belong, more than denomination, nationality, or political party. Listen! Jesus was the ONLY expected person in human history. Sure, your parents expected a baby in nine months, but they did not know whom they were getting. BUT the Messiah, the Savior, was expected. The person of Jesus was anticipated, expected. And when He comes again it won’t matter what denomination you are or what political affiliation you hold. What matters is that your name is found in the Book of Life. It is also true that we cannot compromise regarding who we think Jesus is just to be accepted by a fallen world.

 When in the first century C.E. theories abound about who Jesus is, Peter has the right answer. Look with me at Matthew 16:17-18: “Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” Here we have more revelation; we must never forget that it is Christ who builds His church (see Colossians 1:18). Does Christ have first place in your heart? That question shouldn’t come with a quick answer. It should come with deliberate contemplation. Am I living a transformed and transforming? (again, reference Matthew 16:17-18). Jesus bestowed His blessing upon Peter knowing full well that Peter was going to fail miserably. But Church, failing doesn’t disqualify us from being used by God. Unrepentance disqualifies. There must be evidence of what we believe. While the world is preparing for pandemics and wars, Heaven is preparing for a wedding!

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\*Colossians 1:18

18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

 In Caesarea-Philippi, Jesus says that the gates of Hades will not overpower His Church. Everything of the surrounding area—the fallen world, the sinful culture-- will not prevail against Christ’s church. This is essential doctrine. Believers must identify with the Holiness of Christ. This is essential doctrine. Believers must evangelize, testifying in love to their culture of the true nature of Jesus. This is essential doctrine. Who do you truly say that He is? Before we share together in the Lord’s Supper, let us take a brief moment to reflect on that question.

Matthew 26:26-28

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” 27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

I Corinthians 11:26

26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Passages that support this message:

Exodus 3:13-14

13 Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” 14 God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ”

Matthew 16:13-17

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” 14 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.