

12th Sunday after Pentecost
August 23th, 2020

“Jesus’ rock-solid church - Built Jesus Tough!” (Matthew 16:18)
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 16:16-18

**“16 Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
17 Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh
and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I
also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the
gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.**

Here ends our text.

The gates of hell that is, will not prevail against Jesus’ church! What a declaration from the mouth of Jesus! What a comfort this is for His church, the body of all believers, the one holy apostolic church of all believers, that is, the Una Sanctum, who are built on THE Rock, Christ, the Son of the Living God. Our epistle from Romans 11 says,

“so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

It is the greatest comfort for all Christians, for you and me to know, that the powers of hell...anything that comes out of the gates of hell...cannot prevail against us. For all confessors of Christ are built into His rock-solid church! When Jesus builds, He does it right the first time and it lasts forever. The church is “Built Jesus Tough”.

The Ford motor company has a slogan that been a winner for them for some time now. I’m sure you’ve heard it, “Built Ford Tough” It elicits images of trucks pulling heavy loads up mountains. The message is that these trucks are built to last, built by a company that has been around since cars were first built by Henry Ford.

Maybe you remember the 1987 commercial of a Ford truck going up a rocky mountain with a Chevy truck across its bed, while pulling a Dodge truck and a GMC truck. Well, whether you drive a Ford, Chevy, Dodge Ram or any other vehicle, eventually, your

vehicle is going to lose its toughness. It's going to wear out and get replaced. Parts rust, break, get dulled by the sun, and give out. I haven't seen too many 33 year-old trucks being driven around these days

Maybe you feel like an older truck that's got some mileage on it. In these past 6 months of pandemic has your life been disrupted, plans put on hold? Has there been some upheaval, changes? Throw in a hurricane on top of that and do you feel like it's a hard pull to get up the mountain? Can the mountain of despair become overwhelming? In only 5 months, over 175,000 people have died to the coronavirus in the U.S. It is now the 3rd highest cause of death only behind heart disease and cancer. It's higher than accidents and strokes.

Our Old Testament reading speaks of the transient world we live in and our own short lives as well.

“For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, And those who dwell in it will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not be abolished.” (Isaiah 51:6) The gates of hell will not prevail! Built Jesus tough!

Since sin entered the world, we've lost our toughness to withstand all the physical difficulties of life. And then, there are the spiritual assaults. Are there going to be assaults from the gates of hell on Jesus' church? On your faith? Will you be tested like the disciples on the sea or the Canaanite woman? Yes, of course. Jesus had just finished warning the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Though the disciples thought He was talking about bread at first, Jesus plainly tells them, to beware of the **“doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees”**. (Matthew 16:12).

Any teaching that is not solely about Christ and His saving work, but elevates man and his works of self-righteousness, is from the devil. Any teaching that makes sinful man the rock of his own salvation is absolutely dangerous to the soul. Beware! Beware of man's works righteous wisdom and his imaginations for they are his eternal ruin. They lead to the eternal junkyard of hell.

Jesus tells us why His church is rock-solid, and why you should be a part of it! Jesus' church continues strong! And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!

- I. Because it's built on Jesus
- II. Because it's built by Jesus

First, Jesus' church is built on Himself, the immovable, unchanging, Chief Cornerstone. To get the right answer, the right question needs to be first asked. Jesus asks His disciples the right question in our Gospel. Simply... **“Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”**

The right answer gives salvation, blessedness. The wrong answer is leaven and brings condemnation. This is not a game of Trivial Pursuit, but a life and death pursuit of sinful man's soul. But thanks be to God that He hasn't forgotten about mankind but is pursuing their lost souls. It is God who is revealing, only what God can reveal...where salvation alone can be found.

Yes, Jesus calls Himself the Son of Man. He is a true man, born of the virgin Mary. But is there more? Is Jesus more than true man? Who do people say that He is? Just a good man who has been given some gifts to help people? Some say the Son of Man is John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, answered the disciples. They were all very devout servants of God. Is that all? What do you say? Who do you say that I am? And that question is asked to each of us. For each of us must answer upon whom or what our lives are built upon.

Simon, who is called Peter, answers.

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Yes!!! Yes!!! That is the answer, THE only answer that gives life. For Christ is God and in Him is the life of the world. And He gives life to all who make this confession of faith. Jesus is the resurrection and the life! He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Jesus answered, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

Blessed! You are blessed to know who Jesus is. You are saved in this knowledge. This knowledge you didn't invent. It's not by flesh or blood. You couldn't have answered this question correctly unless the Father had revealed it first to you. The Father reveals that His church is built on Jesus and Him alone. This is the rock confession that Peter spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter is blessed because he is built on Jesus!

I have to warn you that there is a lot of leaven in the world when it comes to this verse. Again, leaven is any false teaching, any soul-destroying teaching.

There are those who would make Peter the rock of the church and not his confession.

There are those who would claim that they alone are the church because they alone follow the apostolic succession which began with Peter. And, with such a false premise, they then claim that anything that the leader of this “church” says is authoritative and

inerrant. And all people outside of said church are not saved. What a bunch of rope a dope leaven by someone whose name rhymes with the same and starts with a “P”! No! One does not pray to Peter or Mary or John the Baptist, or Elijah or any saint for help or salvation. Wrong answer!

Remember the Canaanite woman from last week. Her faith wasn’t based on Peter or any of the other disciples who wanted to send her away. It was based on her Lord, son of David. Jesus sought her, not vice-versa. He elected her. He found her not vice-versa. He went to her land. News of Jesus spread to her. The confession of Christ spread to her, person to person.

Some would give the Canaanite woman all the credit for her persistence, her quick wit to find an opening to get help for her daughter. Yet, her persistence was based on the gift of faith that was revealed to her even before she found Jesus. For she addresses Him as Lord, even before anyone would acknowledge her or interact with her.

She came with a rock-solid faith that the Holy Spirit had given her. Scripture doesn’t give us these details, not even her name. Just her confession of faith. “Lord, Son of David.” And, that confession, would not be denied. Not by the gates of hell, not by the disciples, not by angels, not by Jesus Himself!! It was built Jesus tough. Oh, woman great is your faith!

It is important to see in today’s Gospel that Jesus makes a very clear distinction between “Peter” and “the rock” in the Greek. Peter is Petrus and rock is Petra. Grammatically, the first is masculine and the second is feminine – big difference. Yet, Jesus uses Simon’s name to drive home His point that Peter had a rocklike faith...BECAUSE and only because it was built on THE Rock, the Petra, Jesus Christ.

Listen again to the right answer which Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote about in his first epistle!

“Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” 7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,” (1 Peter 2:6-7)

Zion, the church of God’s people, is built on this precious cornerstone – Christ. They are not put to shame for they are united with Jesus and His righteousness. They are cemented to Him through faith. So glorious are the believers of Christ that look how Jesus describes them in the very next verses.

“you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Peter called Jesus “the Rock” by confessing Him to be the Christ, that is, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. This was the right answer! This is your right answer and mine that we confess in the Apostles creed.

Listen to Luther:

"Therefore the entire Apostolic Creed is included in these words: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'; namely, that He is the Son of God, the almighty Father, the Creator of heaven and earth, and that our Lord Jesus Christ was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, that He suffered for us, that He died and was raised from the dead, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father, because He is Son, Judge, and Lord over all; that He distributes forgiveness of sins through the Holy Ghost, unto the resurrection and to eternal life."

That’s how Jesus builds His church through the forgiveness of sins that He won by His death on the cross. Jesus climbed the mountain of sin that we couldn’t climb. He pulled the heavy load of our debt of sin. He endured the punishment for us. He was tough when others fled. He alone faced hell itself and conquered it by His death and resurrection once and for all! The gates of hell shall not prevail against His church because it is built on the Christ, the victorious Lamb of God. And all who are built into His church share His victory. The church is built “Jesus Tough”!

The gates of hell shall not prevail because the church is built on Jesus and also...

II. Because it’s built by Jesus

“I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

“I will build My church”

We don’t have to worry that the blueprint to build the church laid out in Holy Scripture is faulty. Jesus alone builds it His way. He builds it simply through His word and Sacraments. Anything else is leaven. There is no need for gimmicks or ploys.

If you’re going to build a car, you start with a strong chassis. Jesus built His church with His word given to His prophets and apostles. Their God-inspired teaching is the foundation that Jesus placed on Himself, the cornerstone. Listen to Ephesians 2.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

How does Christ save people? He saves them by His gifts! His treasures of forgiveness and salvation. It is the key to unlocking heaven! Literally, Jesus says in our Gospel. **“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”**

Jesus loosens sins through the absolution. He loosens sins through baptism as they are washed away. He loosens sins as God’s people receive His very body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine for their forgiveness of sins.

These gifts Jesus uses to build His church. And He gives them to His church to accomplish His purpose of salvation. He hands the keys of the car to His people and says drive it. Forgive sins! What you loose on earth, is loosed in heaven. Who is He speaking to?

“I will give you”, the church, these gifts of grace, not just to one person, Peter. So, Jesus repeated these words to His church when He rose from the dead.

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:23) “If You forgive” means “if y’all forgive”. Jesus uses the plural, because His gifts are not just given to one person, as in Peter. No, they are given to all of God’s people in many and different ways, for the building up of Jesus’ church as only He knows how to build it!

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” our Epistle reading says. It continues. **“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them” (Romans 12:6)**

Jesus will continue to supply His gifts to you, His people to build up His church so that it will be ready to greet Him when He returns. The church is built Jesus tough, on Him and by Him and the gates of hell shall not prevail. Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)