

The 13th Sunday after Pentecost  
“How Jesus builds His Church” (Matthew 16:18)  
August 27, 2023  
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 16:18.

**“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.”**

So far the text...

Did you watch the Presidential Republican debate on Wednesday night? Possibly one of these candidates will be the next president of the United States. And as it always happens, as soon as the debate finishes, the question is quickly asked, “Who won the debate?” Who helped themselves? Who was the winner? Who was the loser?” Quick opinion polls are taken to see who is surging and gaining support and who is losing and will soon have to drop out of the race. Yes, social media is a buzz.

Long before there was social media, there was much talk about a man named Jesus. He had set the world a buzz with His teaching and miracles. And Jesus gathered His disciples together to have them tell Him what the talk was all about. What is the chatter? What are you hearing?

**“Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”**

The question was directed to all the disciples and all the disciples responded. **“So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”**

The opinions of the people varied. Generally, Jesus was looked upon favorably. He was possibly a prophet. He was seen as a forerunner of the Messiah, but not the Messiah. That much was clear.

But, Jesus wasn't asking this question about who the people were saying He was just to get information. Of course, Jesus is omniscient and knows the hearts of all men because He is not just the Son of Man, true man born of the Virgin Mary, but also true God, begotten of His Father from all eternity.

Jesus is having His disciples look at what the world is saying about Himself in all of its varied opinions, and then asking them to make a personal confession of faith.

**“He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”**

Again, Jesus is asking all the disciples to give their response. This is the most important question that each person in this world must know the correct answer to. Over against what everyone else in the world is saying about Jesus, the disciples clear and correct answer must rise and be heard. It's a matter of eternal importance of the soul.

For Jesus says in Luke 12:8,

**“Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God.”**

Over against what the world today is saying about Jesus, He continually asks you to confess who He is to you! It's a matter of eternal importance for your soul! The world may say that Jesus was a decent man. Some may say that His teachings were important in as far as they teach you to respect another person and love another person. Jesus did say that you should love your neighbor as yourself. But was Jesus just a law giver? A commandment giver? Is that what you hear people say about Jesus now a days? What are you hearing on social media about Jesus?

Is Jesus even talked about? Or is the weather, politics, sports, the economy, immigration etc. what people spend their time talking about. Over against all the chatter, Jesus poses the same question to every soul on earth.

**“But who do you say that I am?”**

Last week, we heard the story of the Canaanite woman answer this question without being prompted. She was convinced in her heart of who Jesus was. And she was not going to let anyone, even the disciples, tell her to be quiet and dismiss her. What did she say? “Elijah, have mercy?” “John the Baptist, have mercy?” No she said **“Lord, Son of David have mercy on me”**. This was her confession of

faith. “Son of David” refers to Jesus’ humanity – true man. “Lord” refers to Jesus’ divinity – true God. The Canaanite woman confessed that Jesus was true God in the flesh and that He had the power to help her daughter even with a crumb of His mercy that fell from the Master’s table.

How does Jesus respond? “Great is your” \_\_\_\_\_ what? “Faith”. For her confession of who Jesus is and what He does, heal the sick, raise the dead and drive demons out of people, and open the Kingdom of heaven through His Word and Sacraments, can only given by faith. It must be revealed by the Father through the Holy Spirit. Even to the Gentiles! Even to you and me!

The disciples confessed their faith to Jesus in the boat after He calmed the storm. **“Truly, you are the Son of God.”** And Jesus wants to hear our confession often. He wants us to confess His saving name in the Apostles and Nicene Creed. These are not just words that we repeat each Sunday because, well that’s what you do in church. No this is your solid confession, “I believe”. Over against what the world says about Jesus, you say “I believe in Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, who was born, suffered, died, rose on the third day and will come again to judge the living and the dead.” He will confess me before my Father in heaven on that last day! What a privilege, what a joy, what a gift it is for you to confess what the Father has revealed to you – Jesus your Lord and Savior!

And this is what Peter did. Peter spoke what the others were believing. **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

You are the Messiah, not the forerunner of the Messiah. You are the Christ. You are God – the living God. The God who gives life. Jesus is not the law giver, but the life-giver. He fulfilled the law of loving one’s neighbor because we couldn’t. And by His death on the cross, Jesus loved the whole world and gives life to the whole world.

**“16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”**

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

The key to heaven has been opened for you. You are blessed with faith in Me.

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

Though Peter’s spirit is poor and sinful, though our spirit is poor and sinful. We are forgiven by the Gospel, that Jesus shed His blood for me!

This was the only way to open heaven by Jesus’ death and resurrection. In fact, Jesus repeats this to His disciples in the verses immediately after our Gospel reading.

**“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”**

That is the Gospel. That Good News unlocks heaven. How quickly Peter wanted the Gospel to be something of his own liking.

**22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”**

There is but one key that unlocks heaven. Jesus is the only Way, Truth and Life. How quickly Peter needed to be reminded of this. And Jesus does so with some very strong words, doesn’t He?

**23 But He turned and said to Peter, “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.”**

God’s plan, not man’s plan unlocks heaven! Anything but God’s plan is what Satan himself wants men to believe. Yes, Peter, had many weaknesses, just like us. He took his eyes off of Jesus as we heard two weeks ago and began sinking in the waves. He denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed.

Was Jesus’ plan of salvation built on a sinful, vacillating, weak man like Peter? Did Jesus build His church on Peter? Did Jesus institute an apostolic succession to build His church beginning with Peter? Of course not!

Jesus doesn't build His church on weak human beings. It would fall and crumble. But He builds His church on what is solid...what is a rock... what is unchangeable...what the gates of hell cannot overthrow! What is that? How does Jesus build His church? On the rock of Peter's confession – that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God!!!

This is the Gospel – the Good News. This is God's gift to the world and God's personal gift to you through your baptism! God has revealed to you how you are saved – by the loosing of your sins through your Holy Baptism where they were washed away...through absolution where you hear the words of Christ spoken to your soul "I forgive you all your sins", and through the Lord's Supper, where Jesus gives you His very body and blood that had to be shed for the remission of your sins. This is how God unlocks heaven to you! Daily and richly!

How does Jesus build His church? Through the Good News of the Gospel, Christ Crucified, that unlocks heaven! Who has these keys? Only Peter? Every believer! You and I included! For two chapters later in chapter 18, Jesus repeats what He said to Peter as spokesman for the disciples. The keys are given to all people in God's church!

**"18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."**

God is in our midst, forgiving sins and building His church. He wants all people to know who He is. On the rock your confession of faith in Jesus and mine, God changes unbelieving hearts to say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" Amen.

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