

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 16:13–20

Sermon: “Jesus Is the Rock”

For several Sundays in our Gospel, we have heard about Jesus’ great miracles, namely, the feeding of the five thousand, walking on water, and healing the Canaanite woman’s daughter. Like the disciples who experienced these things firsthand, by our hearing the Gospel, the Holy Spirit enables us also to confess Jesus as the Christ. This confession is powerful, and with it the Church will not be overcome by its enemies but will prevail (Matthew 16:16–18).

Jesus is approaching the end of his Galilean ministry. He has taught and done miracles. Matthew tells us the time and location. It is in the area of Caesarea Philippi. This event followed Jesus’ feeding of the four thousand, his going to the coasts of that region, and his confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees. He is now alone with his disciples. Jesus questions them as to their understanding of his person.

It is necessary that they know who he is so that they understand his work as he continues closer to his crucifixion and completing his mission.

The disciples have been with Jesus for over two years. From the very start of his ministry, it has been the Lord's desire that they come to know who he is and understand his mission. There were times when the disciples seemed to "get" who Jesus was.

Early on, Nathanael declared Jesus the Son of God, simply on the basis of Jesus telling him that he had seen him from a long way off. After Jesus' first miracle, his disciples believed in him. And seeing other miracles, such as the calming of the sea and Jesus walking on water, the disciples worshiped him saying, ***"Truly you are the Son of God"*** (Matthew 14:33). But not until our Gospel lesson for today has a human being declared Jesus to be the Christ. And it came in response to a question Jesus asked: ***"But who do you say that I am?"*** (Matthew 16:15).

We also have heard the Gospel, and by the Holy Spirit's power we confess Jesus. For the true and foundational confession of the church is that Jesus is the Christ.

It was at the very limits of what had been Canaan long before given to the tribe of Dan. Jesus came alone with his disciples. Here he would reveal to them that he was the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One of God.

The region was populated by Gentiles. Idol worship dominated. Nearby, Paneas (today Banias) was dedicated to the worship of idols, particularly to the Greek god Pan. It was a place of rocky outcrops, caves, and dead idols no doubt, spiritually foreboding.

Jesus was concluding his Galilean ministry. The people who heard him speak and saw the miracles had wondered and marveled. Undoubtedly, the disciples knew what was being said about their teacher, Jesus. So, he asks his disciples, ***“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”*** (v 13).

Jesus uses his own name for himself, Son of Man, because he intends to tell them about his passion. It was generally understood that the Messiah would be a son to God.

The answers the disciples reported were not necessarily bad. Although Herod had not seen Jesus, from what he heard he thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised back from the grave. The people thought of Jesus as in the line of the prophets of the Old Testament. There also are hints of the passion: Elijah and Jeremiah were among those who had suffered. John had been beheaded.

As in Jesus' day, many people today think of our Lord only as some important religious figure or as a kind of guru or teacher or as an example. But that is not enough! He is the Christ. At his birth, the angels told the shepherds, ***"For unto you is born this day . . . Christ the Lord"*** (Luke 2:11). Jesus must be confessed to be the Son of God. Jesus is the Son of God. The disciples needed to know. The mission could not move forward unless they confessed him as the Christ.

We need to know it and confess it if we are to be saved.

Jesus asks his disciples, ***“But who do you say that I am?”*** (v 15). All along he was leading up to this question. He wants to know what they think. Peter boldly replies, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”*** (v 16). He speaks for the disciples.

Now we know Peter’s reputation as being somewhat impetuous. It was Peter who told Jesus to tell him to come out of the boat onto the water and to him (Matthew 14:28). Later, during Jesus’ passion, Peter refuses to have Jesus wash his feet, but then tells him to wash all of him. Later he says he will never deny Jesus, but soon, at the high priest’s palace, he vehemently denies three that he ever knew Jesus. There’s a bit of Peter in all of us. Thankfully, our Savior is patient with us and invites us to repent and say we love him.

The Bible tells us that no one is able to say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). Jesus tells Peter that his confession, made on behalf of the Twelve, comes by revelation of the Holy Spirit.

His words to Peter, ***“Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven”*** (v 17), are a great blessing.

We have the revelation of Scripture. The prophets and apostles speak to us through the Bible. Peter must have had these words of Jesus in mind when he wrote about the Bible being inspired. He says, ***“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”*** (2 Peter 1:21).

In the explanation of the Third Article, Martin Luther begins by saying, ***“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel.”*** There are many Christians who find this hard to say because, by nature, we want to do something for, have a part in, or take some of the credit for our salvation. But we can't! The Holy Spirit must and does do it for all who believe. By the preached Word and the Sacraments, we have forgiveness and faith in Jesus. By his power, we are able to confess he is the Son of the living God.

This confession, that Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, is the Christ, is foundational to the building of the Church. Paul tells us that the Church is ***“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets”*** (Ephesians 2:20). It is in the Word of Christ that we are rooted and established (Colossians 2:6–7).

Jesus responds to Peter’s confession by calling him by his name and reminding him that it means “rock.” Peter speaks for himself and the apostles. The confession he makes is rock solid. The Church is not founded on any person except Jesus Christ. By this confession that he is the Christ, and by the witness and testimony of the apostles, Jesus builds his Church.

He also promises that he will later give the keys to heaven to the Church. And he did! When Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, at night on the first Easter, he ***“said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,***

‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld’” (John 20:21–23).

These keys we have received; they are the preaching of the Gospel and the proclamation of forgiveness to all who repent. They open up heaven to repentant sinners, and they bind the unrepentant.

Hell, too, is locked, but in another way. The grave threatens with death and would hold all who enter it. But its gates cannot hold those who are

Christ’s. ***“All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life”***

(Romans 6:3–4). By his death on the cross and his resurrection three days later, Christ has freed us from death and the grave. The saying is

true, ***“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”***

(1 Corinthians 15:55).

With Christ, our enemies are overcome. The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh threaten us constantly. They would have us give up and despair. The unrepentant remain slaves to sin. Christ has come to free us and liberates us.

Right after our lesson, Jesus will tell his disciples that he must suffer and die. That is why the Son of Man has come into the world. Only the God-man, Jesus Christ, is the true Savior of the world. He keeps his promises and fulfills the Old Testament. He suffered and died, shedding his blood so that we might have eternal life.

Just as Jesus gathered his first disciples and showed them the way, he also calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us by his Spirit. He washes us, he feeds us and helps us through life and we live under him in his kingdom.

Amen