

Jesus and Peter Part I
August 26 and 27, 2023

First in a Series of Two Sermons, "Jesus and Peter"

Matthew 16:13-20 - Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 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. 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." Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Debi was gone for ten days recently visiting her mom and family, and so I was in charge of doing things I don't normally do. Responsible for tasks I'm usually not concerned about. Looking for items that I don't usually have to look for. Like light bulbs, for example. I needed to replace a light bulb on my desk lamp, and so I threw the bulb away on a Thursday, but couldn't find where they were. I looked on Friday and then on Saturday, and on Sunday, I almost admitted defeat and asked her, but I knew she would make fun of me for not knowing where they were, so I didn't. On Monday, I finally found them in the guest bathroom closet. For a moment, I was proud of my achievement, until I realized that the bulb really wasn't burned out - I just needed to flip the switch that would activate that lamp. I meant well, but didn't get it right.

Then I read about a man whose wife sent him to the grocery store to get seven items. Numbered 1-7. Except he misread the list and concluded that his wife wanted him to get one block of Velveeta cheese, two bags of tortilla chips, three packages of hamburger meat, four cases of bottled water, five bags of sugar, six containers of pasta, and seven whole canisters of salt. He meant well, but just didn't get it right.

Peter was one of those men who meant well, but didn't always get it right. Next weekend, we'll focus on Peter getting it wrong and Jesus snapping at him, "Get

behind me, Satan.” Two Sundays ago, we saw Peter getting out of the boat, walking in miraculous fashion on the water, then sinking in fear, and getting scolded for having a little faith.

In today’s Gospel lesson, Peter gets it right. Jesus asks first of all what people are saying about who he is. And secondly to the disciples, “Who do you say I am?” And Peter nails it, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” In reply, Jesus commends Peter as a blessed man. He points out that it wasn’t really Peter who figured out the correct answer, but rather the Father who is in heaven had revealed this truth to him. And then Jesus went on to promise that on the basis of this confession, He would build His Church and that the gates of hell would never prevail against it.

Two questions we would ask and explore on the basis of this conversation between Jesus and Peter. 1) What are people saying about Jesus these days? And #2) What is Jesus actually doing these days?

What people are saying about Jesus these days?

Jesus asks a lot of questions, and today’s Gospel is no exception. One scholar commented that Jesus is recorded in Scripture asking no less than 307 questions. We’ve made the case in our July sermon series that Jesus was the Master Teacher. He wasn’t just a good teacher, He was the perfect teacher. He didn’t just ask good questions. He asked perfect questions.

Who do people say I am? The disciples answered that some people were saying that Jesus was a herald of national repentance, like John the Baptist. Others were saying that He was a famous worker of miracles, like Elijah. Others were saying that He was a terrific prophet who was proclaiming God’s Word, like Jeremiah. Some were saying that He was a political messiah who would overthrow the corrupt Roman government. All were underestimating who Jesus, in fact, was.

To this very day, people are underestimating who Jesus was, is, and ever shall be - *the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, who for us men, women, and children and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, died,*

buried, descended into hell, rose again, ascended into heaven, sitting at the right hand of the Father, ruling all of heaven and earth, coming back again soon.

Barna researchers report five observations these days about what people are saying about Jesus

1. 92% of Americans say that Jesus was a real person, including 87% of millennials.
2. 56% believe that Jesus was God, including 48% of millennials. 35% say He was a spiritual leader. 17% aren't sure Who He was and is.
3. 52% of us believe that Jesus was without sin.
4. 68% of women and 56% of men say that they are committed to Jesus.
5. 63% of us say that Jesus is the way to heaven, and many others say that living a decent life full of good works will get you there.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers who get it right every time they confess their faults to God in heaven above and take into their hearts the forgiveness of their sins. They get it right every time they speak with confidence one of the ecumenical creeds. They get it right every time they go looking for their neighbors who need a listening ear, a helping hand, or a word of encouragement. They don't always get it right, but as often as they put themselves in a position for the Spirit of God to reveal truth to them, He does exactly that. And not just any old truths, but the kind of truths that set people free and change lives once and for all.

What Jesus is actually doing these days?

Far more important than what people are saying about Jesus is what He is actually doing.

Two important truths we learn again today about the kingdom of God. One is a sweet promise, and the second is a sobering reminder.

Truth #1 is a sweet promise that wherever Jesus is confessed as the Savior and Redeemer of the world, His Church will be unstoppable.

When Peter got it right about who Jesus was, Jesus responded by saying how blessed Peter was. Peter had not expressed something he had figured out for himself with his own human reasoning. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.

As we move towards the installation of Pastor Galligar, we rejoice in the simple truth that pastors and people don't build the Church. Churches don't build themselves. Jesus builds His Church in His own time, and in His own way. So often our conversations turn towards trying to explain why life is the way it is. And yet in today's Epistle lesson, Paul reminds us that God's ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

To be sure, Jesus would be using Peter and the other disciples in the building of this Church. Jesus would be the cornerstone. The witness of the apostles and prophets would be the foundation. And believers in all the generations would be living stones in this Church.

What an awesome promise we have that the gates of hell will not prevail against the one true and apostolic Christian Church. The martyrdom of our Lord's disciples would not take the wind out of the sails of this ship. Just the opposite is true - the Church is often at its best when persecuted. And it's worst when the sailing is smooth. Let that sink in, dear friends.

Truth #2 is a sobering reminder of what it means that Christ has handed to every local congregation the keys of the kingdom.

It's pretty obvious what it means to possess the keys to a house. It means

1. That you have the rights to a house, either because you built it or purchased it or because the owner trusted you to take care of it
2. Keys mean that you can live in and enjoy the comforts of that house.
3. Third, keys mean that you control who is let in and who is barred from entering.

So also to possess the keys to the kingdom, three observations.

1. We have all the rights and privileges of being in the family of God. The privilege of waking up each morning, making the sign of the cross, rejoicing that our sins have been forgiven, the soiled records of the past have been washed clean, and we have another day to try and get life right.
2. It means that Christ and His Spirit have taken up residence inside of us. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. By faith we have access to God's grace in which we stand. As often as we cry out for mercy, all of heaven rejoices. As often as we go looking for our God, we find that He has already come looking for us, He found us, is with us, and will never leave us.
3. Possessing the keys of the kingdom means we have the authority to forgive the sins of those who are repenting and to warn those who are not repenting

that they're asking for trouble. We use the Gospel key when we assure hurting and broken and sorry sinners that they are loved and valuable and clean. We use the tough love key when we speak hard truths to friends and family caught up in sinful habits that are threatening to shipwreck their faith.

Outreach Magazine tells us the story of Linda, who has lived with a nightmare for over 30 years. The worst day of her life was the day her 26 year old daughter who was pregnant with her second child, stopped to help two 15 year old boys whose car had quit on them. They proceeded to sexually assault her, shoot her dead, and leave her in a field near a dirt road.

Linda had tried with all of her heart to forgive her daughter's murderers. But she couldn't. She joined victim support groups, but found little comfort there. She was stuck in her bitterness. Finally she asked to meet with one of the boys, now released after serving 23 years in prison and trying to live a better life. Linda learned that he had been abused and neglected early in life, he expressed total remorse, he gave no excuses. By God's grace, the Holy Spirit worked in her heart a miracle of forgiveness. From that day forward, she became an advocate for what is called restorative justice, which is aimed at helping victims to find God's peace and offenders a chance to make things right.

A Heart from God. A Heart for our neighbors. That's what it means here at Faith Lutheran to get life right.

On our bad days, we get life wrong. We get stuck in our bitterness, and we keep our Savior at a distance.

On our good days, we cry out, O God of new beginnings and second chances, here we are again.

On our really good days, we go looking for folks who need to hear that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that His great desire is to show mercy. On every one of our days, no matter what, we are who God says we are - the loved, the forgiven, and the precious children of our Father in heaven. Amen.