

You Are The Christ

Matthew 16:13-28

August 27, 2017

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

So before we get any further into this passage, I want to say a word about verse twenty. That verse says that Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. Scholars have labeled this as some kind of great Messianic secret. Aren't we supposed to tell everyone that Jesus is the Messiah...the Savior of the world? Of course we are. So what was Jesus saying here?

The answer is found right in the passage. We sometimes go hither and yon to find answers when the answer is right before us. Yes, Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah. And no...he had no idea what Jesus-being-the-Messiah meant. Right after confessing Jesus as the Messiah, Peter said he would stand in the way of Jesus going to the cross. When Jesus said he had to suffer and die, Peter said, "No way! Never Lord! This will not happen to you."

Well, yes...it did have to happen. So while Peter demonstrated some understanding of who Jesus was, he and the rest of the first twelve had much to learn. Jesus did not want the disciples running off and giving some half-informed testimony about him. There was more to learn and a Holy Spirit to be received before they would be witnesses for Jesus.

But Peter did make the great confession.

This is a passage that has some special meaning for me. I am reminded each time I read it that I do not know all I think I know. I am reminded each time I read it that I must be open to having what I think I know challenged. I am reminded each time I read it that I might have to replace what I think I know with a new thing to know.

I am reminded of Greg Penn. Greg Penn was a young person in a Bible discussion I was once leading. Greg Penn was pretty smart. He was also younger than I was. I suspect he still is younger than I am. We were reading and discussing this particular passage. We got to the part where Jesus referred to Peter as a rock. Peter means rock. Jesus said on that rock he would build his Church. And so I went on to talk about Peter being the rock on which the Church was built. I had not been following Jesus for very long at that point. The family tree on my father's side is Irish Catholic. I went with the understanding our Catholic brothers and sisters have of this text.

Greg spoke up. "Uh, Dan," he said. "I don't think it means that. I think Jesus was saying that his Church would be built on the confession Peter made. Jesus is the Messiah. The Church is built on that." Not much discussion and convincing was needed. Right then I knew he was right. It was a Holy Spirit-leading-me-into-truth moment. The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord.

Many of you have heard me present this outline before. I'll try to make it brief. The life and ministry of Jesus can be divided into two parts. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke lay this out.

We read from Matthew's Gospel. Part one is chapter one through chapter sixteen and verse twenty. In part one Jesus teaches people who he is. He uses parables and teachings and miracles to accomplish this. Check this part out. You will not find one direct teaching from Jesus to his death. He is teaching about his person...who he is. So at the end of this time Jesus asks the question, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" Then he asks his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" It's like Jesus is saying he has spent all this time teaching the people about who he is. Now he

wants to know if the people get it...if his disciples get it. Test time. Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Savior of the world." Right answer.

Now, with the right answer having been given, Jesus could move on to what he had come to do. He goes from his person to his passion. It was at this point he began to teach that he would suffer and be killed and be raised. Peter and the rest had difficulty with that part.

This is true of so many. We are quick to confess Jesus as the Messiah...as our Savior. But when it comes to what Jesus did and does...and what Jesus asks us to do...we struggle a bit.

But the crux of the text is the question. Who do you say I am? After all is said and done, our answer to that question is the most important answer we will give. Jesus asked a lot of mostly rhetorical questions. This one demands an answer. Jesus did not ask his disciples, "So what do you think of my teaching on prayer? What did you think of that walking-on-water thing? Pretty cool, huh?" Jesus did not ask a hundred questions he could have asked. The only one was, "Who do you say I am?"

We each must answer that one. And let me say this...hear this. My answer to that question—our answer to that question—says nothing about Jesus. Now hear this. Jesus is the Messiah. My answer to the question does not change that truth. I could say Jesus is the new third-line center for the Minnesota Wild. That foolish answer would not change the truth that Jesus is the Messiah.

Who do you say I am? My answer to that question says a whole lot about me. My answer to that questions shapes my life. Also, who we—we as a community of faith—who we say Jesus is defines how we live as a community of people who say we follow Jesus.

Look...there are those who say that Jesus was a wise man...a wise teacher...one of the wisest. Look at some of the great things he taught. People were amazed by the things he taught. There is no debating that Jesus was a wise teacher. But if that is all we believe Jesus to

be...well, then following Jesus is nothing more than ordering our lives around a set of teachings.

There are those who say that not only was Jesus a wise teacher, he was a great moral example. True. But if that is all we believe about Jesus, then we are ordering our lives around a set of wise teachings and a high moral and ethical standard.

Here's the deal on this. There have also been other great and wise teachers. There have been other great moral examples. We could list several. But we are not here today because of them. We are here today because of Jesus. And we are not here because Jesus was a great teacher and moral leader. We are here because Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. This is our confession. The Church—this church—is built on that confession. How does this then shape us? How does this define who we are and how we live as followers of Jesus? Well, this means we want to be like him. We want to be like Jesus...just like Jesus.

Boy, what a challenge.

Be like Jesus. I think about this. Know some of the things I think of? I'll tell you. I think that it ain't easy. I think about all the people I do not like. And then I think about what Jesus said about loving my enemies. Why did he have to say that? Not only that, but Jesus said I should pray for those who persecute me. A couple of his wise teachings. And I wonder...did Jesus really mean that? Come on! Do you think Jesus really and truly meant that? There has got to be an exception clause somewhere in this arrangement.

But then there is that cross. And on the cross Jesus loved his enemies and he prayed for those who persecuted him. "Father, forgive them..." Then I think about Jesus dying for me and for us...and he did so while we were yet enemies and how this proves God's love for us.

I confess Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. This means I want to be like him.

I think of how I am quick to judge and how Jesus did not condemn sinners...obvious sinners.

He loved them. There was that woman who was brought to him. She was caught in the act of adultery. The very act. The law said—no, the law commanded—that she be put to death. That part of the story seems to be overlooked. But there was no doubting what the law said. Jesus did not condemn her.

We confess Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. We want to be like him...not just in some ways...but in all ways.

You see, right after Peter made his confession, Jesus called the whole gang together. He told them all that any who wanted to follow him would have to deny themselves and take up their own cross and follow. This means doing exactly what Jesus did. Not just some of what Jesus did...but everything...being like Jesus. Jesus denied himself. He bore his cross. He invites us to walk in his exact steps.

Jesus is the Savior of the world. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is our Savior. The Church—our church—is built on this confession. This means we want to be just like Jesus. It means the Church—our church—shows Jesus to the world. Believe me, this world needs to see Jesus...Jesus who loved and forgave and died and rose.

We have got to show them.

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."