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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
August 7, 2016
12th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Samuel 7:5-12, Acts 17:15-34
Hymns: 234; 376; 465; 50:2 (238:3-5)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 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. 19 And 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." 20 Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: What are people talking about?

What are people talking about these days? Maybe for the next several days we will have a break from politics as people talk about the Olympics. Maybe one thinks, “We can only hope!” But when people are talking politics (and increasingly it’s becoming a rather unsavory topic this election cycle) people are talking about personalities more than issues. One asks, “What do you think about Hillary Clinton?” People will answer the question with very different responses depending on their political point of view and their own personal priorities. Some say she is extremely qualified to be president, while other people say she is totally untrustworthy. Then the conversation turns to Donald Trump, “What do you think about Donald Trump?” Again one will hear very polarized responses ranging from, “He’s the one who will make America great again,” to “How can one who is so touchy possibly be trusted with the ‘nuclear button.’” It’s all about what people think, and what they are willing to say.

Jesus also noticed that people were talking about Him, and who they thought He was. They were expressing **their** ideas and **their** feelings about Jesus. This is a far more important topic than politics or the Olympics. Knowing the correct answer leads one to –

THEME: The Rock of Our Salvation.

Jesus posed a question to the disciples regarding what they overheard people saying, to bring the disciples to the realization that the truth about Jesus is –

I. Not based on Human Speculation.

In response to the Lord’s question the disciples listed at least some of the options that people were suggesting. Some suggested that Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life after Herod had John beheaded. Some knew the Scriptures well enough to recall the prophecy from Malachi that Elijah would come again (Malachi 4:5), which in fact Jesus had already taught His disciples was referring to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:14). Others grabbed onto the name of one of the other prophets of old who were known to be bold teachers of God’s Word and identified Jesus with one or another of them.

What did all these ideas about Jesus have in common? While there may have been a smattering of Biblical knowledge attached to them, they were not based on knowledge, but rather on human speculation. Human speculation can rally a great deal of enthusiasm and arouse excitement, however it doesn't lead to the truth about Jesus. These were ideas that came from people that were excited about Jesus, were following Jesus, listening to Jesus, seeking healing from Jesus, and yet they didn't know what to think about who Jesus really was. They were missing the key ingredient to possess saving faith, and that is understanding Jesus' person and purpose.

Giving credibility to human speculation or human reason over the authority of God's Word can lead people away from the truth, and leave them vulnerable for spiritual attacks on their faith. Much of today's religious community is loaded with such speculation about Jesus. Much of that speculation contains a smattering of scriptural knowledge, but still leads away from Jesus' central message.

When the question concerning Jesus' identity is answered with Jesus being a great teacher, well that is true and we appreciate that fact as we read the gospels, but when that is emphasized over Jesus atoning sacrifice on the cross, it can diminish one's understanding of Jesus' identity as our Redeemer and something essential to faith is at risk. When Jesus is identified as one who set the best example of love and justice for us to follow, again there is a smattering of truth there, for we know the greatness of Jesus' love, we know that Jesus was and is just in all His ways. However, when that is separated from Jesus as Redeemer from sin, and social programs and political justice are put forth as they are in the liberation theology that dominates much of the mission work of Christian denominations in third world countries, then the most important message of all is misplaced and lost to those who needed that gospel of God's forgiveness in Christ.

When in our own country human reason is the dominant source to answer that question about Jesus' identity then even more dangerous ideas come forth. People embrace the idea that Jesus' natural father was either a Roman soldier who had assaulted Mary,

or Joseph, and the real account of Jesus' incarnation is relegated to the trash heap as myth created to appease a primitive people. Human reason and speculation can be a dangerous thing, for our natural minds are more ready to accept what comes from such sources than --

II. The Truth Revealed by God.

Jesus continued this lesson with His disciples with the follow-up question' **"But who do you say that I am?"** Simon Peter was quick to serve as spokesman for the entire group of disciples, answering the Lord **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** Peter gave Jesus the answer that lay at the very heart of Jesus' identity. It is such a simple statement and yet it is jammed packed with truth that saves! Jesus is the Christ, or the Messiah. That was identifying Jesus' office or position. We say Christ together with Jesus so often I wouldn't be surprised if some thought it was Jesus middle or last name. It wasn't His name. It designated Jesus' office. When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ Peter was declaring that Jesus was the Savior promised of old, the Messiah that was to come. Jesus was the promised Seed of the woman, Eve, who was to crush the serpents head (Genesis 3:15). Jesus was the promised descendant of Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 22:18). Jesus was the Christ who was to come and save us from our sins.

More than that, Peter also identified Jesus as **the Son of the living God**. Jesus was and is the Son of God. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and thereby, as the eternal Son, He took upon Himself our human flesh and blood, and so became man. He was always and is forever the true and eternal Son of God.

These two facts are central to the Jesus' identity and central to our salvation. Only as the eternal Son conceived by the Holy Spirit could Jesus have been born into this world holy and undefiled. Only by being the eternal Son could Jesus' sacrifice for sin upon the cross be precious enough to cover the sins of the whole world! Only by Jesus being the eternal Son who was then **"born of a woman, born under the law"** (Galatians 4:4), could His perfect fulfillment of the law have been seen and credited as righteousness to all who believe.

Peter confessed the truth, but it was not because Peter was smarter than all the rest of the people who had been following Jesus, who had been caught up in so much speculation about Jesus. Peter as well as the rest of the twelve were guilty enough when it came to vain speculation about Jesus and the coming of His kingdom. But this central truth lay in Peter's heart and was expressed by Peter's lips because of the revelation of God the Father concerning His Son. Jesus said in our text:

Mathew 16: 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."

This is significant for it speaks to the authority behind the answer. Ideas abound about a lot of things. People go on the internet all the time. Too many are fooled into thinking that what they have found on the internet is right and true. One needs to know the source from which one's knowledge comes. Peter did not think this up about Jesus. He didn't learn it by listening to the rumor mill, or following the popular thinking of the day. He didn't even come to this conclusion about Jesus' identity by his own contemplation. Peter's confession of faith concerning Jesus' identity was revealed to him by God the Father.

What makes this wonderful is that this truth comes from the highest authority. It wasn't just something Peter stumbled upon or came from his own ideas. Peter didn't say "I **think** you are the Christ, the Son of God." Peter testified; "You **are** the Christ, the Son of the living God

This is just as true for you and me today as it was for Peter. ." That same authority stands behind our faith and our profession of faith. Don't say or even think, that *I think* this or that about Jesus. **KNOW** about Jesus that He is the Christ the Son of God, your Savior. **Know** that you have this truth on the highest authority, for it still comes to us from God. This is when it becomes so very important for us to know with certainty that the Bible is the Word of God. Every bit of the Bible has been given to us from above. It comes down to this, that what Peter stated about Jesus is --

III. Rock Solid Truth.

Jesus applied this truth to the disciples.

Mathew 16: 18-19 “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. 19 And 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.”

The Lord desired that they always recall this truth about Jesus, so He called Simon “Peter,” the rock. Jesus continued, using a different form of the word rock to teach the disciples that this was the solid truth upon which the Lord would build His Church. The Church is built upon the rock solid truth regarding Jesus’ identity and the forgiveness of sins which Jesus alone secured for us.

Sin is serious business. It is not to be taken lightly. Jesus was not licensing sin by redeeming us from the curse of the law. Nor is He making light of sin by announcing full and free forgiveness. That full and free forgiveness is based on the rock solid truth of Jesus’ identity as our Lord and Savior. It was in connection to this truth that Jesus assured the disciples that in proclaiming this forgiveness that what they bound on earth would be bound in heaven and what they loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven.

What all this adds up to for you and me is that when we confess our sins to one another, or together here at church, and then announce God’s forgiveness to one another, **that is the rock solid truth**. There is no doubt that this forgiving is being done in heaven also. Jesus stands behind the forgiveness for Jesus paid the ransom price for our sins. He secured this forgiveness and no one can nullify this forgiveness.

This is why the Lord stated that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Now, if one thinks of the gates of Hade as the gates of hell or the gates of death and the grave it amounts to the same thing. The devil is rendered powerless before this gospel. One whose sins have been forgiven cannot and will not stand accused before God. This is the rock solid truth of your salvation!

However, “**But be not deceived, God is not mocked**” (Galatians 6:7) Those who are insincere in their repentance, who think they have every right to live a sinful life, they will not be forgiven, and they are not to be assured of forgiveness here on earth. They are to be served a full measure of the law with all its condemning force that they might yet turn away from their sinful ways and repent and be saved.

Finally, after making sure that we all should know the full solid truth upon which we stand in our faith Jesus gave what sounds like contradictory instruction.

Matthew 16:20 “Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.”

Why would Jesus order silence? A couple of important reasons become apparent as we study the gospels. The disciples’ knowledge of Jesus was still incomplete, incomplete to the point that they expressed repeated confusion concerning the nature of the kingdom of God, and why Jesus was visibly present here on earth. They still looked for a restoration of national glory for the Jews to come from Jesus when He would assume an earthly throne. Also, all things were not yet fulfilled that they might be clearly presented first to the Jews and then to all the world. The time was fast approaching when all would be fulfilled, and we still live in that last time of the earth, the age of fulfillment when all believers would function under the great commission. Jesus would have us all understand that this rock solid truth of our salvation is also our purpose for being here on earth, that we might “**proclaim the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light**” (1 Peter 2:9).

Let us be sure in this knowledge. We do not cling to the speculations of man. We hold to the truth which God has revealed in His Son. **Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God.** Our forgiveness is not only full and free, it is certain beyond doubt. Our sins are forgiven, we have peace with God, and this peace is what we have to share with all world. To this end help dear Father in heaven.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.