



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

LifeGroup Study

June 9, 2024

Matthew 16:13-25

Community

THEME FOR TODAY

The tradition of this family is to confess and profess Jesus as Lord, placing ourselves under his Lordship. This family has a “head of the household.”

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

Jesus is the Christ, the King who is enthroned on a cross.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

Take up their cross and follow him, pouring out their lives for God’s work of reconciliation and redemption.

INTRODUCTION

Some of you may remember the TV show from the 50s and 60s called *What’s My Line?* A blindfolded panel tries to guess the occupation of the person sitting right in front of them. In our text for today, Jesus asks his disciples a similar question. “Who do you think I am? What do you think I’m here to do?” It’s as if the disciples are blindfolded, as well, because they continue to guess at Jesus’ plans and purposes. Today the blindfolds come off, and Jesus reveals the plan.

ICEBREAKER

Growing up, was your vision of Jesus more like Santa Claus or your mean elementary school principal?

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, you invite us to take up our cross and follow you. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to see you clearly and understand your plans and purposes for your world. Allow us to touch the activity of your Kingdom around us, and participate in the redemption and reconciliation of all things. We want our identity to flow out of our relationship with you. Amen.

Content

BACKGROUND

This text is a major turning point in Matthew, and the culmination of Jesus’ public ministry to this point. The question of Jesus’ identity has been central to the first 16 chapters.

“What kind of man is this?” (8:27)

“Are you the one who was to come?” (11:2)

“Could this man be the Son of David?” (12:23)

Jesus has brought his disciples far north, to Caesarea Philippi, to retreat from the crowds. Located at the headwaters of the Jordan River, the region had long been associated with idol worship and pagan deities. What an interesting location to raise and settle the question of his identity.

(Read Matthew 16:13-25).

Apparently Jesus had to raise this first question (“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”) more than once. The verbal tense implies repetition. Perhaps Jesus asks each disciple individually, or perhaps they are hesitant to offer honest answers.

Jesus first asks his disciples what others are saying about his identity. From the answers given, the common perception seems to be that Jesus is a forerunner of the Messiah, and not the Messiah himself. Some, like Herod, thought Jesus was John the Baptizer re-incarnated. Others, seeing Jesus’ miracles (especially the resurrection of the dead) naturally thought of Elijah. Still others associated Jesus with Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. These connections harken back to Deuteronomy 18:18, where God promises to raise up a prophet like Moses from among the Jews. “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.”

Jesus moves on to a more personal question: “But who do you say that I am?” Notice the change in reference from title to personal pronoun. Also notice that Jesus does not ask what the disciples think or believe, but who they *say* he is. Jesus wants to know what they are ready to confess. In a sense, Jesus is drawing a line in the sand and inviting the disciples to step over it.

Naturally, Simon speaks and steps first. “*You* are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Rather than a forerunner of the Messiah, Simon rightly identifies all the hopes and longings of the Jews with Jesus. Simon identifies Jesus not as a miracle-worker or prophet, but as the promised King and Savior. Rather than connected to the false idols and gods of the world, Jesus is of the one, true, living God. Finally, the secret is out!

DISCUSSION How much time do you think elapsed before Simon offered his answer? Why?

You can sense Jesus’ joy and relief at Simon’s confession. They have passed the test! Their eyes have finally been opened ... sort of! Jesus calls Simon blessed, and affirms that this truth has been revealed to Simon by God rather than human reason. Jesus responds to Simon’s emphatic confession with an emphatic statement of

his own. He gives Simon a new name: Peter, meaning rock. Jesus plays on words, “You are Peter (*Gr. Petros*), and on this rock (*Gr. petra*) I will build my church.” Roman Catholics have taken this to mean that Peter was the first pope. Protestants have understood it to mean that the church will be built on the confession of Jesus as the Christ, not on Peter as a person. While *petros* is masculine and generally refers to a single rock, *petras* is feminine and often refers to bedrock or a rock quarry.

DISCUSSION After Peter tells Jesus who he is, Jesus tells Peter who he is. How is your identity shaped by your relationship to Jesus?

“The gates of Hades” refers to the gates of the dead, and death will not prevail over the power of the church’s proclamation of the gospel. Some understand the gates of Hades to refer to Satan, but gates are defensive security measures, not offensive weapons.

The meaning of verse 19 has been a subject of debate for centuries. The future tense (“will give”) probably points to the time after Jesus’ resurrection, and after Peter is reinstated to fellowship with Jesus. Luther understood the keys to the Kingdom to be the power given to the whole church to pronounce the forgiveness of sins. Others believe that Jesus is referring to the keys commonly held by scribes as a symbol of their teaching function. Rabbis had the authority to interpret the law and could “bind” or “loose” certain behaviors. They determined what was permissible in community life, and what was not. Christian speaker and pastor Rob Bell suggests that this power is given to the local church community. The community should read, study and debate, through the Holy Spirit, what God is saying in scripture, and then discern what is permissible and what is not. If this is true, consider the implications for our current crisis over the issue of homosexuality!

DISCUSSION What are some modern equivalents of “binding” and “loosing?”

Why does Jesus say all this in response to Peter’s confession? Perhaps because the church exists wherever the confession of Jesus as the Christ is made, and so Jesus is compelled to lay out the basics of this new community’s identity, purpose and life.

DISCUSSION Do you believe that the church exists wherever the confession of Jesus Christ is made? Why or why not?

Finally, Jesus strictly forbids the disciples to tell anyone about his identity as the Christ. Why? In the literary flow of Matthew’s Gospel, the full identity and meaning of Jesus as the Christ will not be revealed until the King is crowned and enthroned on the cross. Until the cross, we cannot know what it means that Jesus is the Messiah. At this moment, Jesus begins his steady journey to Jerusalem, and to predict his suffering and death, a reality that the disciples cannot yet grasp.

DISCUSSION In what ways do the blindfolds start to come off the disciples? What are some indications that they are becoming more aware of Jesus’ intentions?

GOING DEEPER: THINKING ABOUT SUFFERING

Christians and non-Christians alike are every bit as confused today about who Jesus is as the early disciples were. Unless we keep our hearts focused on Jesus as the suffering servant of God, we will struggle when life gets tough. In the midst of pain and difficulty, we might wonder if God is punishing us, or if we don’t have enough faith, or if God loves us, or if God even exists at all. After all, if God exists and loves us, we wouldn’t suffer, right? Wrong.

Comfort? No! God promises to comfort us in tough times. Talk about a time when God comforted you in tough times.

Abundance? No! God promises abundant life. What does abundant life look like to you?

Health? No! God promises spiritual wholeness. Describe spiritual wholeness. Have you ever experienced it?

Happiness? No! God promises a joy that transcends our circumstances. What’s the difference between happiness and joy?

DISCUSSION

Whenever we lay hands on and pray for confirmation students, we ask that God will give them “patience in suffering.” What’s the connection between suffering and faith for you?

Application

Choose to serve someone this week in a way that “costs” you, or causes you to be uncomfortable. Let the experience of hardship connect you with cross of Christ and the redemptive power of God. Talk about what this serving might look like. Share some ideas and then report next week about what happened.

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, you invite us into a new Kingdom reality that pushes back against the self-focused agenda of the world in order to live for your agenda of self-sacrifice. We know that we cannot live into this reality on our own. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, and you comfort us in tough times, give us abundant life, promise spiritual wholeness, and fill us with a joy that transcends our circumstances. On the cross you revealed who you are and why you came. The cross invites us to come and die in order that we might truly live. In the empty tomb you reveal your real identity. Go with us into this week as we seek to serve others and experience your redemptive power. Amen.

Matthew 16:13-25 NLT When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (14) “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.” (15) Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?” (16) Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (17) Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. (18) Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. (19) And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.” (20) Then he sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. (21) From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead. (22) But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. “Heaven forbid, Lord,” he said. “This will never happen to you!” (23) Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.” (24) Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. (25) If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.