

New St. James Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, August 23, 2020  
Rev. Mark McLennan

“WHADDYA SAY...?”

Scripture Readings

Exodus 1:8–22

Exodus 2:1–10

Romans 12:1–8

Matthew 16:13–20

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This Gospel passage is tough:

I came to this conclusion after doing a lot of reading this week – sermons, articles, commentaries – and they all had valuable insights.

- The next three verses should be added, but we have to wait til next week
- There are multiple ways of approaching this text
- There are multiple sermons possible from these few verses – some about Peter, some about Jesus, some about the Church

When I read this passage, I quickly connect to Peter.  
I always do this when Peter is in the story.

I have always connected to Peter rather strongly.  
He was big, loud, impetuous, not always right, - and sometimes downright wrong.  
Are you seeing the connection?

But this is one of Peter’s better moments, I think.

He makes one of the most significant statements in the Gospels – he identifies, by name, Jesus - as the **Messiah**.

This story is well on in Matthew’s Gospel.

After spending many months with Jesus – watching what he did as a teacher, healer, and prophet – the disciples were starting to catch on to what Jesus was about.

They were starting to realize that he was more than just a charismatic figure, doing miraculous things and talking about the Kingdom of God.

At this point, Jesus finally asks them – “*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*”

The other disciples mention – John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets.

So, Jesus asks – *Who do **you** say that I am?*

Then - Peter blurted out his answer, in his usual impetuous manner.

This time – he got it right – the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

Jesus then engages Peter:

- He blesses Peter – gives him his own personal beatitude, as one commentator suggested.
- He addresses him as *Simon bar Jonah* – Simon, son of Jonah [an image of resurrection, by the way]
- Jesus points out that this identification has been given to Simon by God
- Then Jesus gives Simon a new name – **Peter**, and declares that Peter will be the rock on which Jesus' church will be built
- The gates of hell will not prevail against this Church
- Finally, he gives Peter the keys of the Kingdom

**Todd Weir** suggests that an onlooker or eavesdropper might see this encounter as ludicrous:  
Does Jesus have the authority to bestow all these blessings on Peter?  
Even if Jesus does have such authority, why would he choose this fisherman?

#### QUOTE:

*"What would make Peter worthy of this trust?  
As the world looks at people, net-minders are seldom world-changers.*

*He is not a man of wealth, learning, or great intellect.*

*Peter is the first disciple to speak the word Messiah out loud, but wouldn't they all have been thinking that by now?"*

*I can only speculate on what Jesus saw in Peter.  
...Peter's strength is his sense of urgency, his ability to see the importance of the moment and then act boldly.*

*He is often criticized for rash words, such as protesting his courage at the Last Supper.  
But what memorable religious leader did not have a few rash moments?  
Luther, Calvin, or a few Popes?*

*Peter was the first bold enough to speak the word Messiah, the one who would get out of the boat and try to walk on water to Jesus, he drew the sword to defend Jesus...and though he denied Jesus three times....*

*Peter's failings did not stop him from trying again, or rob him of his urgency and boldness....*

*This urgency, seeing the import of the moment, and acting with boldness and compassion, is what the Church is built upon, and the kind of leadership it needs, from pulpit and pew."*

Well – no pressure there!!

#### Peter Woods:

If the church of modern times has a recurrent failing, it is that we over-think everything.  
Careful and considerate of public image, market share, orthodox, doctrine, and , not to forget, treasury implications, we remain forever...puzzling what to do.

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Clergy, elders, convenors, leaders, church members and adherents:

**WHO DO YOU SAY THAT JESUS IS?**

That question made me think of a song by Joan Osborne from a few years back – I think I used it in a Christmas Eve service one time:

**One of Us** - recorded by Joan Osborne

If God had a name what would it be?  
And would you call it to his face?  
If you were faced with Him in all His glory  
What would you ask if you had just one question?

And yeah, yeah, God is great  
Yeah, yeah, God is good  
And yeah, yeah, yeah-yeah-yeah

What if God was one of us? Just a slob like one of us  
Just a stranger on the bus Tryin' to make his way home?

If God had a face what would it look like?  
And would you want to see, if seeing meant  
That you would have to believe in things like heaven  
And in Jesus and the saints, and all the prophets?

And yeah, yeah, God is great  
Yeah, yeah, God is good....

What if God was one of us? Just a slob like one of us  
Just a stranger on the bus  
Tryin' to make his way home?  
Just tryin' to make his way...

As Christians, we believe that God was one of us – divine, but also human.

Jesus the Messiah is what sets us apart in world religions – not that he was a great teacher, or healer, but that he was **MESSIAH** – the resurrected Lord.

Only Matthew's Gospel links Peter's declaration to the Church.

### ***WHO DO YOU SAY THAT JESUS IS?***

How we answer this question makes all the difference in the world.

It does not change the reality of who Jesus is;  
rather, it shapes and defines who we will be.

For our confession regarding Jesus shapes the way we live as church—as a community of disciples.

In reporting their response in this way, Matthew is suggesting that the church is a body of believers that is grounded upon and lives out Peter's confession.

Church is the community of the Messiah, the fellowship of the Son of the living God.  
It is not a social club, a religious institution, a moral society, or a building.

Church is a people whose life together is defined by the reign of God manifest in Jesus the Messiah and Son.

This can be a difficult journey.

Being friends with Jesus is not easy; the way this confession leads is costly and demanding.

But it is also a great gift; the way of Jesus leads to full and abundant life.

***“Who do you say that I am?”***

This is the heart of the matter for us as the church.

How we answer this question, with our lips and with our lives, defines the shape of our life together.

As we come to understand who this Jesus is, we may believe that embodying Peter’s confession is frankly impossible.

And it is, unless we also acknowledge that we are never alone.

Christ walks the way before us and alongside us.

Christ is our constant companion.

Just as he did with Peter, Christ continues to come to us, to dwell with the Church:

*pulling,                  prodding,                  guiding,                  nudging,                  calling,*

**and being with us.**

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, MESSIAH, AND HOLY SPIRIT...AMEN

## **Call to Worship** (inspired by Mark 8:29 and Matthew 16:15)

In the name of the Lord Jesus the bread breaker the light gatherer cross carrier  
welcome

May the peace of the Lord Jesus the peace maker and the temple disturber  
friend of the sinner and companion on the road  
be with us all

Let us draw close to the Lord Jesus - the saviour the healer the teacher - and worship him - and ask  
ourselves - who do we say he is?

## **Prayer of the Day** (inspired by Psalm 138)

Holy God, you are the God above and beyond all things! With trust, hope and humility in our hearts  
and minds, we gather to praise and worship you, the God who always hears and answers our prayers.  
God's promises are trustworthy and honourable, and so with thankful hearts and minds, we praise  
and worship our God who understands and guides us.

We look for you in all the wrong places, God of the lost, and wonder why we cannot find you.

We wander the corridors of power, while you are on the sidewalks, beside the homeless.

We sit at the head tables of the world, while you are handing out soup to the hungry at the kitchen's  
backdoor.

We applaud those who win the race, while you are cheering on those in last place.

In forgiving us, God of new life, you would transform our cold hearts  
into those melted in service to others.

In granting us mercy, you challenge us to think of all those we have ignored.

In gifting us with grace, you enable us to proclaim Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, as the hope, the  
joy, the peace the world seeks. In that holy name we pray...AMEN

## **Words of Assurance/Forgiveness**

God is the giver of MANY gifts.

God is the Creator of the ONE body.

God is slow to anger and quick to forgive.

God helps us to share and honour the gifts of all,

God helps us to heal the wounds and reunite the body.

We are forgiven, loved, and accepted.

Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Amen

## **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Life-giving God, you equip your people with gifts to work for your kingdom, bringing justice and  
peace to every land and community.

Through your Spirit, O God, you give the gift of **prophecy**. Help us to use this gift to speak words of  
justice and truth into situations where people are exploited or treated unfairly. Guide our actions so  
that we might influence change for good in the world, and bring hope to the hopeless.

You give the gift of **serving**, O God, in the example of your Son Jesus. Help us to use this gift to  
serve those who have been cast aside by structures of power and privilege. Increase our awareness  
of injustice and our dedication to work with those who suffer its effects. May the abundance we share  
in our country touch every life and community in this land.

God of wisdom, you give the gift of **teaching**. Help us to use this gift to ensure that every child has access to education and opportunity. Be with every teacher and every student in the coming months as schools adapt to the challenges of COVID-19. Support creative teaching and diligent learning in every school and centre for learning.

God of hope, you give the gift of **encouragement**. Help us to use this gift to hearten all who are struggling in these difficult days. Bless us with words and actions to bring comfort to all who mourn, to those coping with mental or physical illness, and to any who feel isolated or left behind.

God of purpose and promise, you give the gift of **leadership**. Help us to use this skill to build up our communities and model respectful ways of living and loving. Show us how our churches can be places of support within our neighbourhoods.

God of love, you give the gift of **kindness**. Help us be kind to all who cross our paths, even those who anger or upset us. Teach us to be forgiving and reconciling in all our relationships.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ who taught us to pray...

### **The Lord's Prayer**

*Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done, On earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.*

*Forgive us our sins As we forgive those who sin against us.*

*Save us from the time of trial And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
Now and forever. Amen.*

**STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT** *Douglas John Hall - theologian and author  
[and my favourite professor in seminary]*

'Stewardship' has become associated with little more than church management and finances.  
'Stewardship' itself should represent the summing up of a Christian life."

### **Blessing: You are the Body of Christ**

You are the body of Christ.

May you have the heart of Christ,  
tender for mercy.

May you have the eyes of Christ  
to see a world in need.

May you have the feet of Christ  
to bring good news.

Go in peace!

And God go with you.