

Takeaway Lesson - 8/23/26

Matthew 16:13-20 — Who Do You Say I Am? Peter's Confession of Christ

Scripture Focus

Jesus asks His disciples first who others say He is and then makes the question personal: "But who do you say that I am?" Peter confesses that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus explains that this understanding is not something Peter discovered on his own but was revealed to him by the Father. The passage centers our faith on the identity of Jesus and reminds us that the Church is built upon the confession of Christ.

Read the verse(s) aloud

Memorable quotes/notes:

Historical / Linguistic Context

- Jesus takes His disciples to the region of **Caesarea Philippi**, an area associated with pagan worship and, at the time, monuments honoring Roman power. Against this backdrop of competing gods and authorities, Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of the living God is especially powerful.
- The title "**Messiah**" comes from the Hebrew word meaning "anointed one." The Greek equivalent is *Christos*, from which we get "Christ." Calling Jesus "the Christ" is therefore not using His last name; it is confessing that He is God's promised Messiah.
- When Jesus asks, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" the disciples mention John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, and other prophets. These are respectful answers—but they are still inadequate. Jesus cannot simply be placed among the great religious figures of history.
- Peter answers, "**You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.**" Jesus responds that "flesh and blood" did not reveal this to Peter, but the Father in heaven. Christian faith is not merely an intellectual conclusion; faith itself is a gift created by God through His Word and Spirit.
- Jesus says, "**You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church.**" Peter's name (*Petros*) and "rock" (*petra*) form a deliberate wordplay. Christians have interpreted the "rock" in different ways. In Lutheran teaching, the emphasis is placed on Peter's confession of Christ and, above all, Christ Himself as the foundation upon which the Church stands.
- Jesus promises that "**the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.**" Gates are defensive structures, so the image is not simply of the Church desperately protecting itself from evil. Christ promises that even the power of death cannot overcome the Church He builds.
- The "**keys of the kingdom of heaven**" represent the authority Christ gives His Church to proclaim forgiveness to the repentant and to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant. In Lutheran teaching, this is reflected in the **Office of the Keys**: the Church's authority to forgive sins in Christ's name.

Discussion Questions

1. Before asking the disciples what they believe, Jesus asks, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” What answers might people give to that question about Jesus today?
2. Jesus then makes the question personal: “**But who do you say that I am?**” Why is our answer to this question more important than simply knowing what others believe about Jesus?
3. Jesus tells Peter that his confession was revealed by the Father rather than discovered through “flesh and blood.” How does this challenge the idea that faith is something we create or achieve for ourselves?
4. Jesus promises, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” How might this promise encourage Christians when the future of the Church—or even a particular congregation—seems uncertain?
5. Read **Ephesians 2:19-22**. How does Paul’s picture of Christ as the cornerstone help us understand what it means for the Church to be built upon a firm foundation?
6. If we truly confess with Peter that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” how should that confession shape the way we live outside of church on Sunday?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for revealing Your Son to us through Your Word. Give us faith to confess with Peter, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Keep Your Church firmly grounded in Christ rather than in human wisdom, strength, or success. When we become discouraged about the future, remind us that the Church belongs to Jesus and that even the gates of death cannot overcome what He has established. Give us courage not only to confess Christ with our lips but also to reflect that confession in our daily lives. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.