

**Sermon**  
**Matthew 16:13-20**  
**12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost • Sunday, August 23, 2020**  
**Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Coos Bay**

You can almost feel the disciples' hesitancy. Imagine their anxiety. Feel their angst. 'Oh no, it's another one of Jesus' "pop quizzes!"  
 Will we come close to getting his question right, this time?

Just prior to this scene, Matthew records Jesus chastising the disciples for not knowing, for not realizing the gravity of his warning about the Pharisees...so if they have been reluctant to answer the question Jesus posed in today's text, we might have understood. But these are some resilient followers that Jesus has selected. They're ready.

Jesus asks not only what OTHERS say about him, but what the disciples, themselves, think. Now, Jesus didn't *need* to know what others said, and he didn't need to ask what the disciples thought. He already knew.

So I wonder, what would WE say?

I remember when I was asked a question almost identical to this one. I froze.

It was more than 20 years ago that I attended a meeting/an interview, really, at my synod office in southern California as part of the "Entrance" requirements for people to begin the process of becoming a pastor. I had already written the required paper, gone through the psychological evaluations and written, written, written every conceivable history on myself and then, there I was facing these two pastors. I thought the interview had gone well, (even though I was nervous and virtually scared to death), but as they were wrapping it up, one of the pastors asked, in a nonchalant way, "Who is Jesus to in your daily life?"

Pretty simple question, right?

Well, I blanked. Deer in the headlights.

I said nothing for the longest time.

I guess I was trying to figure out what they wanted to hear.

Hey, I'd been a Lutheran all my life, wasn't this stuff just assumed?

Oh, you mean I actually have to put what I believe INTO WORDS?

Actually, yes.

Yes, I did.

Yes we do.

Now thankfully, these men must have understood how nervous I was, because one offered,

"Jesus is your savior, right?"

Oh, yeah, Jesus is my savior.

But out there, in the real world, when someone wonders why we go to church, why we follow this Jesus, there isn't always someone feeding you the answer.

Here, when Jesus asks, "But as for you, who do you say that I am?" he was doing what all good teachers do, forcing his "students" to put what they have learned into their own words. Isn't that what essay questions are all about? Jesus helped his followers to put their faith into their own words so that they could take what they understood about Jesus and begin to formulate what they might say to others. Jesus was preparing the disciples for the time when they would go out to take Jesus' message to the rest of the world.

So, who would *you* say Jesus is?

MY first thoughts go to the song, "For Unto Us a Child is Born" from Handel's Messiah. Handel uses the words from the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah, about the one who was to come. Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. But those aren't MY words, they are the prophet Isaiah's. My words for Jesus are: God on Earth; pure, unconditional love; true grace; salvation embodied.

English is a funny language – with more words than most other languages, but in this case, we use the same word, "you," to mean both singular and plural. Even though I'm not from the South, sometimes, for clarity, I'll say, 'you all ' to ensure that you know I'm talking to the whole group of you. In this instance, when Jesus says "you" it is the plural form.

He is asking the collective body of the disciples, all of them. Simon Peter, then, answers on behalf of the group.

But when Jesus responds, he directs his statement only to Simon Peter, so here Simon Peter plays a unique role in the founding of the new community.

Jesus gives Simon the new nickname, Peter –

Which, in Greek, is Petros and means ROCK..

Of course, it is now, but then, Peter was not a name anyone would give to a child.

We had Rock Hudson, but you don't find that name used much, and certainly not then.

Words and the way they are used are intriguing

Here is the idea we get that the assembly is the church that Jesus builds ...Matthew uses the Greek word for church, ecclesia.. We get the English word, ecclesiastic... Matthew is the only one of the gospel writers to use this word, and I think that he may have been using it to contrast Jesus' "new community," the "new church," with "their synagogues."

Although Peter is to be the foundation, it is important to remember that it is Jesus who is the builder of the church. Jesus is revealed as the one who constructs the new community, pictured as a building.

**As in** the last couple of gospel stories, here Peter isn't singled out because he has attained special insight, or even because he has great faith, but he is special because he has received God's gift of grace...

Think of what it means to receive this grace. To be able to know that our future with God is secure. To know that we don't have to pass any "pop quizzes" for our salvation.

Grace from God is our free gift. And this magnificent grace wasn't given just once and only to this small group of people, but this grace is continually given to everyone for all time.

Again, Peter is again standing in for each and every one of us. He symbolically receives the grace that is the gift for each and every one of us.

If that is the case, then WE are the rock upon which Jesus would build his church.

And here, I think Jesus means us, the collective "we,"

And that is most certainly true here at Trinity....

You are a community that gives of itself, both of its emotions and resources, to help the larger church.

A community of faith that works together and has a vision for its future.

Many of us will be going back to school soon, either as students or teachers.

So, to put us all on the same page, so to speak, here's a little pop quiz of your own to take.

You won't need paper or pencil, I'd just like you to think about the answers to yourself.

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners.
3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.
4. Name ten people who have won a Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
5. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress.
6. Name the last decade's worth of World Series winners.

How did you do?

Seriously. These are no second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields.

But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten.  
The point is, none of us remembers the headliners of yesterday.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. List a couple teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name two people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of four people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.
6. Name three heroes whose stories have inspired you.

Any easier?

The lesson here is that the people who make a difference in your life are not necessarily the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards.

They are the ones that care.

Now it's possible, but I'm not sure if any of us will EVER be included on the first list,  
But I AM sure that you are all part of that second list.  
For your families, for your friends, and for me.  
You have all been a blessing to me.

So **I** will call **you my beloved Gloria Dei Family**  
and it is upon **this** rock, this foundation, this congregation, that together, we will **build**  
*our* **ministry – together.**

Amen.