

## FAITH IS A GIFT

### **Matthew 16:13-20**

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup>And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup>He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup>And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup>And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup>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." <sup>20</sup>Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Jesus says something very important to Peter in our reading from Matthew. As one of the disciples, Peter had seen Jesus heal people. He had heard him preach about justice and forgiveness and he had tasted the bread shared by so many.

And now, after walking along side Jesus and seeing and experiencing all that Jesus would do, Jesus wants to know if Peter and others have been caught up in the faith.

Have they come to know and to trust who Jesus really is?

We know in our own lives how much faith is totally a gift from God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we confess that faith is stirred up in us.

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It comes to us in so many ways, but it is always seen as a gift from God. It is like the wind, strong at sometimes and then it settles down and can even seem totally still.

But in those times, we have the privilege of placing ourselves in places where God can speak to us and stir up our trust in God again like in worship no matter how we are doing it or in devotional reading and praying or in communication with others as the faith is shared.

God has promised to be everywhere so that even in the beauty of creation around us, we can stop and thank God for what we see and hear.

Now, it was time for Jesus to stop and ask if people are getting it. If they are hearing and seeing who he really is.

So he asks his disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is? In other words, what are people saying about me? Who do they say that I am?

The answer he gets is of a mix of people.

Some say John the Baptist.

John the Baptist after all, was a preacher of the kingdom and even Herod thought of Jesus as a resurrected John the Baptist.

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Others say Elijah. Old Testament prophecy indicated that the old prophet Elijah would reappear at the end of the age, at what was called a signal of the arrival of the “great and terrible day of the Lord.”

Others think of Jesus as Jeremiah—the suffering prophet Jeremiah, like Jesus, tangled with the authorities and experienced painful rejection.

Others say he is one of the prophets. The prophets, like Jesus spoke with power as they announced the new action of God in the world.

In other words, to some people, there seemed to be nothing unique about Jesus. It seemed to be the prophets all over again. They look at Jesus and only see religious ideas of the past.

What is it going to take for Jesus to be recognized for who he really is? What does it take for us to see who Jesus really is? We know from history that Jesus was a real person just like Martin Luther or Abraham Lincoln. But how do we see him as more than that?

So now, Jesus directs the question to the disciples and he asks, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter steps up to answer the question. “YOU ARE THE MESSIAH THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD.”

No doubt, that is the answer Jesus wants to hear both from the disciples and from each of us. How is Peter able to say that when so many others don't seem to see this identity of Jesus?

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We may not be able to answer that but Jesus answers it for us. Jesus says to Simon Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven"

Again faith is a gift from God. Faith for Peter and for any of us may take some time. It didn't happen overnight for his disciples and it maybe hasn't happened that way for us either. We learn to live into the faith causing us to love and to trust God like we would a parent. It still comes as a gift from our loving God.

As theologian Thomas Long has written, "Faith is not a gold metal in the spiritual high jump. It is not a sign of our ability to leap to new sacred heights; it is a sign of God's willingness to bend down to us, to be Emmanuel in our world. Peter is able to say what he does only because God came near to Peter through Jesus, the Son. Peter had become a student of Jesus, listening to his words, watching Jesus perform miracles."

Jesus goes on to call Peter a rock and on this rock, he says, he will build his church.

Peter was the first disciple Jesus called, according to the Gospel of Matthew. That gift of faith has been handed down to us now and we become the rock, the foundation the church is built on.

It is our prayer that God will continue to fill us with faith and to continue to pass it on to everyone.

“Who do you say that I am?” Jesus asks. May we join Peter as we say,  
YOU ARE THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD. AMEN

(Long, Thomas, Matthew Commentary)