

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

August 23, 2020

Psalm 138:1-8 (NIV) <sup>1</sup>I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; before the "gods" I will sing your praise. <sup>2</sup>I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word. <sup>3</sup>When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted. <sup>4</sup>May all the kings of the earth praise you, O LORD, when they hear the words of your mouth. <sup>5</sup>May they sing of the ways of the LORD, for the glory of the LORD is great. <sup>6</sup>Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar. <sup>7</sup>Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me. <sup>8</sup>The LORD will fulfill [his purpose] for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands.

Isaiah 51:1-6 (NIV) <sup>1</sup>"Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; <sup>2</sup>look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many. <sup>3</sup>The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing. <sup>4</sup>"Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: The law will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. <sup>5</sup>My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm. <sup>6</sup>Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment

and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.

Romans 11:33-12:8 (NIV) <sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! <sup>34</sup>"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" <sup>35</sup>"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" <sup>36</sup>For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. <sup>12:1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. <sup>3</sup>For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. <sup>4</sup>Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup>We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. <sup>7</sup>If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup>if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Matthew 16:13-20 (NIV) <sup>13</sup>When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup>They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup>"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter

answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup>Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup>And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. <sup>19</sup>I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; 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 warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

### ***The Identity of the King—Outline***

Matthew 16:13-20

- ❑ **Two probing questions** (verses 13-15; Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 14:1-2; Deuteronomy 18:18; Malachi 4:5; see also Luke 22:69)
- ❑ **Jesus' identity revealed by God** (verses 16-17; Ephesians 1:17; Galatians 1:15-16)
- ❑ **A new identity in Christ** (verses 18-19; John 1:42; 1 Peter 2:4-5; Colossians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17)
- ❑ **A secret identity?** (verse 20)

### ***The Identity of the King***

Matthew 16:13-20

Who am I? During long car rides my children enjoyed, and now my grandchildren play, a variation of that game.

After secretly picking an object, animal or individual, other players ask questions to determine who they might be.

Who am I? is not just a child's game but an important question to ask ourselves.

We live in a society obsessed with identity, and ironically one that suffers from a crisis of identity.

People are obsessed with finding out who, as individuals, they really are; but though endlessly pursuing that goal, they end up confused about their identity.

In our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus asks two piercing questions about His identity.

Now, Jesus did not ask these as if He was uncertain about who He was. Jesus was not confused about his own identity, but asked these questions to confront the confusion of others, including his own chosen apostles.

But the question of Jesus' identity, and also our own identity, is central to this passage of Scripture; and so this message, which is part of a series of sermons from the Gospel of Matthew on ***The Good News of the Kingdom***, is titled ***The Identity of the King***.

We are told that Jesus took his disciples and journeyed some twenty-five miles (and seventeen hundred feet uphill) from the Lake of Galilee to the source of the Jordan river near the ancient city of Dan, the northern boundary of the Kingdom of Israel.

There, Jesus asked His apostles:

**Two probing questions** (verses 13-15)

Verse 13 gives us the first of these:

*<sup>13</sup>When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"*

The disciples knew that by *the Son of Man*, Jesus referred to Himself. It is the title or description Jesus most often used when speaking about Himself.

It is a fitting one, for it wonderfully expresses Jesus full participation in human life.

Bible teacher John MacArthur accurately summarizes what Jesus meant in calling Himself the Son of Man:

“Because it focused on His humility and humanity in the incarnation . . . it beautifully identified Him as the perfect Man, the second Adam, and the sinless representative of the human race.”

“It was also a title clearly understood by Jews as referring to the Messiah (cf. Luke 22:69; Dan. 7:13).”

That understanding came directly from Daniel 7:13-14. Here the prophet wrote: *“I was watching in the night visions; And behold! One like the **Son of Man**; Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days; And they brought Him near before Him. <sup>14</sup>Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.* (NKJV)

That is what the Jews of Jesus day were expecting. The Son of Man was the Messiah who would be given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.

So, Jesus, by the way He phrased the question, was making a veiled reference to himself as the Messiah—and the Greek word for Messiah is Christ.

But what were the people saying? Jesus wasn’t fitting the popular understanding of the Messiah—after all, they were still under the oppression of Roman rule.

And the High Priesthood was still held by men of questionable character and who were Roman collaborators.

<sup>14</sup>*They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”*

King Herod was among those who thought Jesus was John the Baptist. In Matthew 14:1-2 we are told: <sup>1</sup>*At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, <sup>2</sup>and said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”* (NASB)

The disciples went on to give the common view that Jesus was one of the great prophets who had come back to life. This belief stemmed from Deuteronomy 18:18, where God said He would raise up a prophet like Moses from among the people. So, some people considered Jesus to be Elijah, one of the greatest of the prophets, because Elijah did not die but had been transported to heaven in a chariot of fire, and because Malachi 4:5 promised that Elijah would come again. Jeremiah may have been considered because, according to Jewish legend, he like Elijah, did not die but was taken to heaven and would come again from heaven.

Then Jesus confronts his disciples with the second question:

<sup>15</sup>*“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”*

That is a question that Jesus asks of us today.

*But what about you?” “Who do you say I am?”*

It is the personal question we must all answer for ourselves: who is Jesus to me?

<sup>16</sup>*Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

Like an eager student who knows the right answer Peter blurts it out. I think that answer was on all of the disciples' hearts, even if they dared not speak it.

If we are to answer as Peter did, then Jesus tells us that it must be

### **Revealed by God** (verses 16-17)

*<sup>17</sup>Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not **revealed** to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.*

What Jesus said of Peter is also true for us.

Martin Luther wrote in the Small Catechism: I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, My Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith.

The Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians writing in Ephesians 1:17 (NIV) *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.*

We cannot know Jesus as Christ, as Lord, as our Messiah and Savior, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel as ordained by God the Father.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 1:15-16

*<sup>15</sup>But . . . [God] who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, <sup>16</sup>was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles . . . (ESV)*

We need God to reveal himself to us in order that we might know Him and that we *may know him better.*

Next Jesus gives Peter:

### **A new identity** (verses 18-19)

*<sup>18</sup>And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this **rock** I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. <sup>19</sup>I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

There's a play on words here. The Greek word for Peter, *Petros*, means "rock." So Jesus said, you are *Petros*, and upon this rock, *Petra*, I will build my church.

In John 1:42 we are told that when Jesus first met Peter, He *looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).* (ESV)

Biblical commentator, F. Dean Lueking wrote about this passage: "However one chooses to interpret the reference to Peter as the rock, it is certain that the new name had nothing to do with any solid, rocklike, or unflinching features in Peter himself. . . . He is called the rock because he has faith and confesses that faith in Jesus as the Christ of the living God."

"Peter is the [example or the template] of all who follow Jesus. In Peter, whether boldly treading the waters or sometimes sinking like a rock, whether full of understanding or often of little faith, whether confessing him or denying him, Jesus sees what building material he has for his church. It is material that must be shaped altogether by grace." *The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels* p. 96.

And that is true of us all.

Peter would later write in 1 Peter 2:4-5, *<sup>4</sup>As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup>you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a*

*holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (ESV)*

Peter was well aware that as God had used him, the first of these *living stones*, the Lord would call others, by grace, to be *living stones* to be *built up as a spiritual house*—as the Church.

Peter is presented in our gospel lesson as that template for all who will confess Jesus as Christ . . . as Savior and Lord.

And Jesus will build His church by rescuing sinners from the clutches of Satan—to storm the gates of hell, as it were, which shall not prevail against the power of the gospel.

Colossians 1:13-14 says, <sup>13</sup>*For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,* <sup>14</sup>*in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (NIV)*

Being called the “Rock” also identified Simon Peter with Jesus—who, in Scripture, is called the rock. It identifies who Peter would become in Christ.

And so, it also identifies us with who we are in Christ.

Then Jesus said, in verse 19, *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.* Keys in scripture represent authority. Jesus has given us the authority to carry out His mission of building His Church—authority to set people free through the gospel; authority also to declare God’s judgement upon the unrepentant and unbelieving. Keys for binding and loosing.

I’m not going spell this out further right now. Suffice it to say, this is part of our new identity in Christ.

The Bible, especially in the book of Acts, shows that Peter indeed became a mighty man of God. Matthew, however, in his gospel is content to show Peter with all of his flaws and failures, as well as his faith, so that he

might be the example of those God chooses to be His disciples, to enter His kingdom, to be part of, and to build His church.

The focus is not on who Peter was [past tense], but who he would become in Christ. And so, our focus should not be on who we are or have been, but on who we are in Christ.

In his book, *The Comeback*, Pastor and author Louie Giglio, shares the testimony of a woman who became a member of his church named Rachel.

Rachel had reached the bottom of the very dark and deep pit that was her life and was determined to kill herself. But women from Giglio’s church showed up that night at the strip club where she worked and shared the love of Jesus Christ with her.

As they talked about Jesus, Rachel felt ashamed; Jesus could never love her. She was an exotic dancer. She was drug addict. She was an alcoholic. And she was a horrible mother. Based on that identity, she asked out loud, “how could Jesus ever love me? How could Jesus ever be proud of me? How could Jesus ever call me his daughter when I feel so unworthy?”

But the good news, that Jesus came to save sinners, even, or maybe especially, the worst of sinners, broke through to her heart and she was gloriously saved and transformed.

Who am I? is a question we must ask in light of this passage. Are you a broken sinner? Or a redeemed saint?

If, like Peter, you have confessed Jesus as the Christ, your Lord and Savior, you can identify as the later, even if there are vestiges of the former in your life.

As Adolph Hitler came to power in 1933, a fiery young theology professor at Berlin University, delivered a

radio lecture in which he denounced the German political system which had corrupted and grossly misled a nation and made the “Führer” its idol and God. The broadcast was cut off before he finished. Refusing any part of a Christian compromise with the Nazi government, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, went to England and then to the United States.

Two years later Bonhoeffer was back, teaching in an underground seminary, training 25 young pastors. The seminary was closed by the Gestapo. Bonhoeffer was forbidden to teach, write or publish. He continued to move about the country, preaching and speaking to clandestine groups, and acting as a courier to the Resistance within Germany. In 1943 he was arrested, and in April, 1945, just days before the concentration camp at Flossenburg was liberated by the allied forces, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed by special order of Heinrich Himmler.

In prison Bonhoeffer gained the trust and respect of even his captors and was given permission to minister to the sick, teach Bible studies and conduct worship with his fellow prisoners.

Even the SS doctor who certified his death said, “I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.”

Those who witnessed his compassion, courage and unshakable faith said that Bonhoeffer stood as a giant among men. Yet, in his own eyes, he was a child before God. Sometimes he seemed to have become a riddle to himself. In a moving poem he asked:

### **Who am I?**

Who am I? They often tell me  
I stepped from my cell's confinement  
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,  
Like a Squire from his country house.

Who am I? They often tell me  
I used to speak to my warders  
freely and friendly and clearly,  
as through it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me  
I bore the days of misfortune  
equably, smilingly, proudly,  
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really that which other men tell of?  
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?

Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,  
Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing  
my throat,

yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,  
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,  
tossing in expectation of great events, powerlessly trem-  
bling for friends at an infinite distance,  
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,  
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all.

Who am I? This or the Other?

Am I one person to-day and to-morrow another?  
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,  
And before myself a contemptible weebegone weakling?  
Or is something within me like a beaten army  
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely question of mine,  
Whoever I am, Thou Knowest, O God, I am thine."

Who are you?

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* (ESV)

One final note from the last verse in our gospel text, which may cause us to ask, “why did Jesus want a

**A secret identity?** (verse 20)

*<sup>20</sup>Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.*

Just when Peter comes up with the right answer, Jesus tells the disciples that they can't tell anyone! What's up with that?

Jesus refused to allow his followers to proclaim him as the Messiah until he had taught them what Messiahship actually meant. Their ideas of the Messiah needed the most radical change possible.

This is the turning point in the Gospel of Matthew—the true **identity of the King** had been revealed, but they still needed to learn the tortuous path Jesus must then take to be enthroned as King and what that would mean for them as His followers.

And that, dear friends, is next week's message on ***The Cost of the Kingdom.***

Let us pray . . .

Benediction: Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever.  
Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17