

11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
"Who Do You Say That I Am?"  
Matthew 16:13-20

"Who do you say that I am?"

"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

In this confession of faith this confession of Peter's from today's Gospel we find some of the most familiar words in the whole New Testament. And in Jesus' response to Peter, "On this rock, I will build my church" we find some of the most significant words in the history of the Christian church.

The Roman Catholic Church understands this promise to Peter to be the beginning of the organization of the Church so that the papacy is traced back from the present Pope symbolically back to Peter.

The Protestant Church, including Lutherans, find a different emphasis in this passage. Instead of an event which established church authority and structure, through Peter, we believe that God was using this event to teach us something about faith. In Peter's confession, God was demonstrating how faith in Christ is the seed, which God uses, to build the church.

God builds the church, through faith.

And while we have the human institution of the church, all of our denominations, and synods, and church councils, all of which are important and can be used to do God' work we need to remember, that these structures, these ways we organize ourselves, are nothing without faith.

Have you ever heard someone called a "pillar" of the congregation? Then you may have heard the joke about how you can tell who the real "pillars" of a congregation are.

They are the ones that "hold up" the church.

Sometimes that's what happens.

God plants the seed of faith in our hearts, he gives us gifts and talents, and then he calls us into mission. God calls us to be "living stones" cemented to the cornerstone, which is Christ.

But, sometimes instead of "living stones," sometimes we are more like "pillars." Instead of responding to God's call, instead giving our time and talents to God's work, we stand around like "pillars" holding up the church, holding back God's mission.

This morning, I'd like to bring you a message, for those times when you might be feeling more like a "pillar" than a "living stone."

This morning, we're going to take a closer look at Peter, and see how God can make something significant out of what the world sees as insignificant. That's how God chose to work in Peter's life, and that's also how God chooses to work in our lives.

Now at first, you may not see that in today's Gospel. After all we're talking about Peter, aren't we? Peter, "the rock" the apostle of the apostles, a man of great faith.

How can we compare in significance with Peter?

How could God ever use me to do the kind of things he called Peter to do.

But do you remember from Peter's confession, what God uses to build the church? The power of God can accomplish anything through a seed of faith in you and me.

Consider these words from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians:

"Brother and sisters, think of what you were when you were called,  
Not many of you were wise by human standards;  
not many of you were influential;  
not many of you were of noble birth.  
But God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise."<sup>1</sup>

We can't forget that Peter certainly suffered his share of failures. But even in his greatest failure, when he denied Jesus three times, God used that experience to turn his life around.

God was able to work powerfully in Peter's life, not because of his own greatness, but because of the greatness of God's grace and mercy in his life.

Through Jesus Christ, God planted the seed of faith in Peter. God nurtured it through times of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, and through the Holy Spirit, God's glory shined through Peter's life.

In the same way, God is also working to plant seeds of faith in us this morning... maybe in a new way, maybe for the first time, or maybe to deepen the roots of our faith.

I may not know the exact way that God is choosing to work in your life. But I'm sure of one thing, that God has chosen to meet each one of us where we are... and through the power of the Gospel, God is working to take what we may think is insignificant, and turn it into an avenue of service that is quite significant.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:26-27a

Through our encounter with the Word, who is Jesus Christ, God is working powerfully to bring us life, hope, and salvation. God wants each of us to know him, and be known by him.

That's why Jesus asks us, as he asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"

Up until the time Jesus asked this question in Matthew's Gospel only the demons had recognized who Jesus was. The demons recognized Jesus as one who had authority over them, and had come with the power to defeat them.

Jesus' disciples, on the other hand, had not been so certain about the identity of this man they were following.

The crowds also failed to recognize Jesus, as the promised Messiah. Jesus was drawing large crowds, but it was mostly out of curiosity, and in fact, opposition to his ministry had already begun.

And so at this pivotal point in Matthew's Gospel, the point just before Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem, God seems to be using this event in Jesus' life to teach us something about who Jesus is.

Matthew makes it clear that Jesus is not to be confused with John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah. That's who the people were saying Jesus was, but they were still confused.

So turning to his disciples, Jesus asked, "Who do YOU say that I am"?

Now isn't it interesting that instead of coming up with his best sermon, to clear up, once and for all, who He was, Jesus decided to let this important message be delivered on the lips of Peter, a fledgling disciple.

In this case, instead of choosing to come right out and tell his disciples, "this is who I am" Jesus helps them learn through the questions he asks, and the answers they offer.

Instead of telling them what to believe, Jesus helped his followers discover who he is as the Holy Spirit planted the seed of faith in their hearts.

Isn't that often, how it is with us?

If you look back over your life of faith, can you think of times when God planted seeds in your heart, and then little by little, helped you discover, and catch a glimpse of who Jesus is.

God plants seeds of faith in our hearts through faithful parents, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, church musicians and pastors.

Just think about all the seeds of faith that Mary has planted throughout her ministry, through Bible studies, V.B.S. and all the prayers and visits with people.

In more ways than we can count, and through people like Mary and so many others, the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives bringing us to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, chapter 2, it says,

“As you come to him, the Living Stone,  
rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to Him...  
you also , like living stones, are being built into spiritual house.”<sup>2</sup>

Just like we saw in Peter’s confession,  
God is creating faith in you. God is taking what the world may consider insignificant,  
and building his church from living stones of faith.

You are a living stone.

First, God formed you, then he selected you, with your rough edges and all.  
And now God holds you as his most precious of stones.  
Together with all the living stones around you, God will continue to build this spiritual  
house...this body of Christ called Community Lutheran Church.  
And through this body, God will empower us to serve Christ in all that we do. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:4-5a