

**Proper 16**  
**Mt. 16:13-20**  
**Sermon by Rev. Chip Graves**

One of my favorite weekly television shows was the comedy called Frasier. This show indulged us with hilarious predicaments that Frazier, his brother Niles, his father and his caregiver, Daphne ventured into each week. One particular episode comes to mind. As always, Frasier is pursuing his latest new found love interest. She seems to finally succumb to his amorous pursuit. At a moment's notice, she invites Frasier along for a long car ride along the Pacific coast. His imagination runs wild with possibilities; all alone on a romantic excursion with this beautiful woman. *Could life be more grand?*

But this all seems to come to an abrupt halt as they begin the journey. The trip has only just begun, both are seated in the car and conversing; when all of a sudden, she slowly turns toward him with excitement in her eyes and declares, I was wondering if I could share with you my personal relationship with Jesus Christ. *Talk about a mood killer.....* And now Frazier gets to hear evangelism first hand; and for the next six hours on their journey.

Speaking about Jesus can be tricky. To some, the mere mention of *how is your personal relationship with Jesus* can send them into a frenzied panic, followed by a mad dash for the nearest exit. You can speak of Jesus as a prophet, a holy man, a teacher, or a spiritual leader and few will object. But speak of Him as Son of God or as being divine of the same nature as the Father; and your listener will may go numb.

This speaking of Jesus brings us to our gospel lesson today where Jesus discusses his identity with his disciples in Caesarea Philippi, a city originally named Paneas, after the Greek God Pan, the God of Music. Caesarea Philippi is north of Israel at the foot of Mt. Hermon, near the main source of the Jordan River. Caesar Augustus had given this land to Herod. And when Herod died, his son Phillip reamed it after Caesar and himself. So here we are outside Caesarea Philippi and Jesus asks the Disciples, *"Who do they say that I am?"*

They respond. Some of the people suppose him to be a risen prophet. Many had believed that perhaps, similar to the opinion of King Herod found in Mat. 14:1-2 that Jesus was some sort of reincarnated John the Baptist. Some thought Jesus to be the fulfillment of prophecy as the return of Elijah as indicated in Malachi chapter 4. And still others offered the explanation that Jesus was perhaps a return of the suffering prophet, Jeremiah.

Though all of these responses lifted Jesus to prophet status, none were accurate. The answers seemed politically correct and with a touch of merit but fell well short of who Jesus really was. Simply put, a high opinion of Jesus was just not enough. And as Peter comes to know, Jesus is far more. And Peter gets it right. *"You are the Son of the Living God, the Messiah."*

The main point of our discussion this morning surrounds Jesus' question, *Who do you say that I am?* In Matthew's gospel, Peter's confession is the first mention of Jesus as the messiah by one of the apostles. And Jesus responds, *Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you.* It is at this very moment that Peter through renewed eyes sees for the first time that Jesus truly was, the son of the living God.

The phrase, the Son of the living God recalls Psalm 2:4 in which God acclaims the king of the people as his Son; and as being sovereign over all the earth. Peter's revelation was truly of the Holy Spirit, beyond human reason. For this, Jesus renames Simon as Peter or rock of the church. This recalls Old Testament figures, such as Abram and Jacob who were also given new names by God. In sum, Peter's confession of faith, naming Jesus as the Son of the Living God, develops the very foundation of the church.

Over and over again we see Peter in the light as the leader of the 12 apostles, the first to speak, the first to take initiative. His response in our gospel today lands him as the foundation of the church and the one to whom is given the keys to heaven. It is the here and now that we most clearly decipher the distinction between reason and revelation. Reason stems from flesh and blood but revelation comes but from God. It is within Peter's revelation by the Holy Spirit that we truly understand who Christ is.

However, there is a more important issue at hand. Jesus asks us here today, in this church, *who do we say He is?* All of a sudden, Jesus' question leaps off the written page and beckons to our heart. He's asking you and me, *"Who do you say I am?"* Jesus is not interested in what the church says, not interested in what someone else says but what you think, as an individual. *Who do you say He is?*

Recently a Lutheran bible class posed this question to its members. Here's what they said; "Jesus is my intercessor just as my mother in childhood was between me and my father." "Jesus is my Savior because he has saved me by his death on the cross." "Jesus is the personification of God for me because God is too big for my mind to handle." And finally, "Jesus is my friend who knows everything about me and still loves me." Notice the different words used to describe Jesus; and how most of them used the word "my" such as my intercessor, my savior and my friend. The relationship described by these students with Christ was always personal. That's because our relationship with Christ is always personal. Ponder this for a moment, pray over it. Allow the Holy Spirit room to move within you.....

With Peter's answer to Jesus we hear the sum of our faith, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* This contains the sum of our salvation. Peter confesses that Jesus is our savior, our very Christ. And Peter shows us that Christianity is a revealed religion, a faith from above, inspired by God. Christianity is beyond a learned belief system and more than philosophical teachings. The revealing of Christ to us, and in us, is a remnant of God's good will and the true foundation of happiness. We are so blessed.

In the end, we see other faiths as having similar core beliefs as Christianity such as love and maintaining principles of the good and true -- but only Christianity has Jesus. And if God had only given us a book, or some set of rules by which to live but not Jesus, we'd be just another philosophy, just another system of thought. *But no!* God went further, revealing himself to us in the flesh as a Jew in Nazareth called Jesus, in Hebrew literally meaning *God saves. And he does.*  
*Amen.*