

Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 51:1-6; Psalm 138; Romans 11:33-12:8; Matthew 16:13-20

Sermon Title: *Built on “The Christ”*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel Reading: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 16th chapter.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, for the context for our Gospel Reading for today, the disciples have been with Jesus for over two years. From the very start of His ministry, it has been the Lord’s desire that they come to know Who He is and understand His mission.

During this time the disciples had seen Jesus’ miracles, such as the calming of the sea and Jesus walking on water. In that miraculous event the disciples worshiped Him saying: *“Truly you are the Son of God”* (Matthew 14:33).

But not until our Gospel lesson for today, has a human being declared Jesus to be the Christ. And it came in response to a question Jesus asked: *“But who do you say that I am?”* (v 16).

I. And so, it was at the very limits of what had been Canaan – long before given to the tribe of Dan:

- Here, a long way from Jerusalem, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus came alone with His disciples.
- Here He would reveal to them that He was the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One of God.

For a little background, the area in and around Caesarea Philippi was populated by Gentiles. It was a place of rocky outcrops, caves, and dead idols. Not surprising, then, idol worship dominated, especially that of the Greek god, Pan – often referred to as a fertility god.

This event took place as Jesus was concluding His Galilean ministry. The people who heard Him speak and saw the miracles had wondered and marveled. Undoubtedly, the disciples knew what was being said about their teacher, Jesus. So, He asks His disciples: *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”* (v 13).

Here we see that Jesus uses His own name for Himself – *Son of Man*. Why does He refer to Himself by this name? Because He intends to tell them about His upcoming passion in His humanity. It was generally understood that the Messiah would be a son to God, thus affirming the divinity of Jesus. For Jesus Christ truly has two natures – *God and man* – in one person.

The answers the disciples reported of Who Jesus was, were not necessarily bad:

- They mention John the Baptizer. The thought of Jesus being John the Baptizer, comes from Herod Antipas who had John beheaded. Although Herod had not seen Jesus, from what he heard he thought Jesus was John raised back from the grave.
- They mention one of the prophets. The people thought of Jesus as in the line of the prophets of the Old Testament.
- There also are hints of the passion in their responses:
 - Elijah and Jeremiah were among those who had suffered.
 - John had been beheaded.

As in Jesus' day, many people today think of our Lord only as some important religious figure or as a kind of guru or teacher or as an example. But that's not enough! He is the Christ. At His birth, the angels told the shepherds: "*For unto you is born this day . . . Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2:11).

Therefore, Jesus must be confessed to be the Son of God. For Jesus *is* the Son of God. Why is this important?

- The disciples needed to know this. The mission could not move forward unless they confessed Him as the Christ.
- We need to know it and confess it if we are to be saved.

II. So Jesus asks His disciples: "*But who do you say that I am?*" (v 15). All along He was leading up to this question. Because He wants to know what they think.

Peter boldly replies: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (v 16).

Now we know Peter's reputation as being somewhat impetuous:

- It was Peter who told Jesus to tell Him to come out of the boat onto the water and to him (Matthew 14:28).
- Later, during Jesus' passion, Peter refuses to have Jesus wash his feet, but then tells him to wash all of him.
- Later he says he will never deny Jesus, but soon, at the high priest's palace, he vehemently denies three that he ever knew Jesus.

There's a bit of Peter in all of us. Thankfully, our Savior is patient with us and invites us to repent and say we love Him. However, the big question is how do we accept our Savior's invitation?

The Bible tells us that no one is able to say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). Jesus tells Peter that his confession, made on behalf of the Twelve, comes by revelation of the Holy Spirit. His words to Peter are a great blessing: *“Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in heaven”* (v 17).

We have the revelation of Scripture. The prophets and apostles speak to us through the Bible. Peter must have had these words of Jesus in mind when he wrote about the Bible being inspired. He says: *“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Peter 1:21).

In the explanation of the Third Article, Martin Luther begins by saying:

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel.”

There are many Christians who find this hard to say. Because, by nature, we want to do something for, have a part in, or take some of the credit for our salvation. But we can't! The Holy Spirit must and does do it for all who believe:

- That by the preached Word and the Sacraments, we have forgiveness and faith in Jesus.
- That by the Spirit's power, we are able to confess Christ is the Son of the living God.

III. This confession, that Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, is the Christ, is foundational to the building of the Church:

- St. Paul tells us that the Church is *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets”* (Eph 2:20).
- Therefore, it is in the Word of Christ that we are rooted and established (Colossians 2:6-7).

You see, the Church is not founded on any person except Jesus Christ. By this confession that He is the Christ, and by the witness and testimony of the apostles, Jesus builds His Church.

Jesus also promises that He will later give the keys to heaven to the Church. And He did! He gave the keys to His disciples after His resurrection, when He appeared to them at night on the first Easter (John 20:21-23). These keys we have received. What are they?

- They are the preaching of the Gospel and the proclamation of forgiveness to all who repent.
- They open up heaven to repentant sinners, and they bind the unrepentant.

Hell, too, is locked, but in another way. The grave threatens with death and would hold all who enter it. But its gates cannot hold those who are Christ's. You see, by His death on the cross and His resurrection three days later, Christ has freed us from death and the grave. Thus, the saying from St. Paul is true: "*O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Therefore, with Christ, our enemies are overcome. However, those enemies, the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh threaten us constantly. They would have us give up and despair. However, Christ has come to free us and liberates us that, we do not remain slaves to sin.

For only the God-man, Jesus Christ, is the true Savior of the world. In a nutshell:

- He keeps His promises and fulfills the Old Testament.
- He suffered and died, shedding his blood so that we might have eternal life.

Just as Jesus gathered His first disciples and showed them the way, He also calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us by His Spirit. Whereby, He washes, feeds, helps us through this life. Flesh and blood have not revealed this to us, but by the ministry of the Gospel we are His and live under Him in His kingdom.

And to top it off, we then serve as the world's lighthouse for the *Good News*. To be a beacon to our families, our co-workers, our communities. This is especially important, as we live in a world that has come under the influence of those promoting rules of radicalism, false prophets, and so many other idols – the *Pans* of our day.

Conclusion: Therefore, dear friends in Christ, having heard the Gospel, and by the Holy Spirit's power we confess Jesus. For: THE TRUE AND FOUNDATIONAL CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH IS THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST.

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!