

## Reflection

by Pastor Di Tait, Student Minister, St. Mark's United Church

### **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.

This text is a two-parter. We have two things happening here that require attention. Firstly, Jesus' identity. And secondly, the foundation of the church.

I spent some time this week talking with a man learning about his journey to faith and how God made an appearance in his life. It was a lovely conversation, and we talked about many things, one was this passage. Jesus was in region of Caesarea Phillipi and what I was told in my conversation was that this was a kind of gathering place of many different religious and spiritual sects. So, there would have been many people with many differing opinions of who Jesus himself was.

Some said he was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah. Obviously, the disciples know that Jesus is not any of those people. But the people, and the disciples might recognize Jesus as prophet, a warrior, a bit of a wild man, much like those characters he was likened to. I wonder who else we might identify.

What else do we call Jesus? A shepherd, a teacher/Rabbi, close friend, confidant, a justice of peace, a son, a brother? Because Jesus holds a different kind of relationship with people, in different phases of their lives, he holds many titles, and we identify him in many different ways.

So, the next question Jesus asks Peter specifically says, "Who do YOU say I am?" This question becomes quite personal, and it gives us pause. And it will give us pause at different times and for different reasons and seasons in our lives.

We can tell a person who Jesus was, historically, biblically, what he has done, the roles he has held in our lives. But when this question is asked, when God looks us in the eyes and says, "Who do you say that I am?", this is what gives us pause. And it should. It should cause us to examine and discern what God has done in our lives so we can answer accurately.

Now about part 2, I said it was a two-parter...

I've always made the assumption that this scripture is interpreted, that it is Peter who will be the foundation of the church. Simon Peter, the Rock, the firm foundation.... But is

it? The reading had me looking at a slightly different angle this time. Looking at “on this rock...” and what rock exactly is this. Since it was just an inkling of a thought I turn to commentary and see what I can find from those wiser than I.

I discovered that when Jesus calls Simon Peter Petros, he says that on this rock, Petra, I will build my church. Petra is a feminine noun, and one commentary also wondered if this meant Jesus wasn't necessarily talking about Peter. So, I wondered what might be between the lines. What did Peter display to Jesus? His faith, his faithfulness, belief, trust, confidence, fidelity in Jesus? This is faith foundation. Interestingly, when you look this up, in Greek, the word is Pistis, a feminine noun. Yes, absolutely I might just be creating a story line to fit my message, not God's. But this is what scripture does. Just like I mentioned last week in our children's, each encounter might illuminate something new in ourselves, in God.

So, what if we read it a little bit differently. On this rock... the Rock of the faith Peter shows. The one who is prophet, healer, warrior, wild man, shepherd, a teacher/Rabbi, close friend, confidant, a justice of peace, a son, a brother. In my conversation this week, my friend recited this passage in the voice of Jesus. And said on THIS rock... pointing to his chest... on this rock... the faith you have in me, your confidence and belief and conviction, even Peter, in the face of occasional doubt, even betrayal, this rock.... Pointing to his self... is firm.

On one hand, I might have started out to say that the church can't be built on a person, it's not on Peter's shoulders, or even on the shoulders of the man of Jesus. But the faith and conviction Peter showed when he understood that Jesus was Messiah, that Jesus is the incarnation. This knowledge and understanding and faith in God is the Rock on which our church stands.

It takes faith, divine action, the Spirit or God, and the action of community to build a church. Now, I would never claim to have all the characteristics of Jesus, what a complex I would have if I did. But as God's creation made in God's image, we all possess something of Christ within us. And we are asked to see Christ in the people we meet. Now I want you to look around you for a moment, and look at the Church you have built right here. This church of belief, conviction, knowledge of Christ, and God's work in the world. We all have a little of Christ in us. Do we hear a prophetic voice in our midst? Have we been witness to healing and compassion? Do we see the warrior in people? The teacher, the confidant, the shepherd? Do we sometimes come across as a bit of a wildling, when it comes to our own faith? This two-parter is really a question and an answer. Who do you say that I am? Really, who?

I am the rock on which is built this church.

I had considered the Hymn *Let Us Build a House* for this morning, but wonder if it fails to convince us or explain to us that the house we are building is not made of brick and mortar. It is not made of Rock, or even built on Rock. The solid, rock-like foundation is our faith.

And so maybe instead we could sing together *Like a Rock*, MV 92.