**Matthew 16:13-20 August 23, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Matthew chapter 16 here re-reading these words. “Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘ Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them ,’But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Later this morning, as you come forward to partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in with and under the bread and wine here at the Lord’s Altar I would invite you to look over at the bottom left side of the altar to see the symbol for Peter. You’ll find two keys in front of an upside down cross. Here in our Gospel reading we find Peter earning his name, as his solid confession and declaration of Jesus as the Christ is the foundation and rock in which the Church is built. Jesus says, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Jesus as the Christ is the foundation upon which we meet together today, that this wasn’t just any man, but that this was the promised Messiah, 100% God, 100% Man, the incarnate Jesus Christ who came to this world to save us from our sins. Peter also is known for what comes next and that’s the office of the keys. “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” This is why I ask you to look at these keys, and really think about this fundamental truth of our lives as Lutherans and Christians. The keys show that sins are forgiven, and also, that forgiveness may be withheld.

Keys are personal. Of course there are universal keys that can open any lock in a building, but you still have to individually put a key into a lock to open it. I still remember my keyring from high school where my brothers and I worked as janitors for the church, and I would describe my keys as the stereotypical janitor’s keys. I had a key for just about anything and it was uncomfortable at times to carry that keyring around with me in my pocket. Car keys, lock keys, home door key, church door key, maintenance room key, spare key to the other car, and what I always find on my key ring, and I don’t know if you have this experience anymore these days, but mystery keys. You aren’t sure how they got there, you have no idea what they go to, but they remain with your other keys until finally one day you clean up your keys, and take them off, not to throw them away or anything, but to stick them in a junk drawer just in case you ever solve the mystery of these strange and foreign keys. Keys are important to our understanding of our salvation in the fact that one key is generally placed into one lock. This is like being called on in school or singled out, this is a personal connection. Your eternal resting, your eternal existence therefore is determined, are you unlocked from sin and set free to the joy and rest of heaven? Or are you locked eternally into your sin and put into the eternal prison of hell? The office of the keys shows that this isn’t just a universal thing, it’s a personal thing. There is no hiding in the background.

Jesus asks his disciples this morning in our Gospel lesson, the words you just heard re-read, the much easier of the two questions he poses, “Who do *people* say that the Son of Man is?” This is not a personal question, it’s not even specific to where they would have to incriminate someone. These are the easiest questions to answer. Who have you heard some people say the Son of Man is? They answer honestly, some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, some say Jeremiah, others say other prophets, it’s not a personal answer. They don’t really have any stake in the answers at all, it’s just the first thing that pops into their heads that they’ve heard other people say when it comes to who the Son of Man is. This is light conversation, and we like to live in this sort of questioning and this sort of relationship. There is a comfort in not committing to anything or taking any side, or taking any stance. No one is asking anything of me, they just want to know what others are saying, or thinking, or doing. We in our own lives like to live in this place, especially in our relationships to others, and even more especially when it comes to strangers. We live in such a heightened climate of division thanks to many different factors, some being social media, some being a lack of person to person contact due to technology, and again many other factors that communication on key issues can be troublesome. So we stay in the shallow end. Talk about the weather, talk about what we ate or what we like to eat, talk about what we’ll do later that day, maybe. Stick to the vanilla topics.

But then things change. Others may say different things about the Son of Man, but Jesus cuts away the others, who cares what they say, “Who do *you* **say** that I am?” Not what you think, not what you believe, who do you **say** that He is? This is as personal as it gets. It comes down to what you confess, because believing in our hearts is important, absolutely, we don’t discount the faith and the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, but what we publicly confess when confronted or asked is just as important because it reveals what we truly believe. It is the public way of showing the faith in our hearts. But we shy away from that. We don’t put those two things together. This is personal. This is public. This is our faith in action, this is the witness of what we believe to others in the world around us. And like moving out into the deeper waters, where we can’t quite touch with our feet the bottom but actually have to start swimming, we in our own sinful desire for being comfortable and not challenged, head back to the shallow end, or get out of the pool entirely.

Paul writes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Living in a state of non-commitment, where you never express what you personally feel, or know with certainty in your heart, is conforming to what the world wants you to be, it’s to blend into the crowd, it’s to never have to personally connect or reveal what you truly believe. The temptation is great to never engage, to always hide, to always blend, to be a chameleon to those around you and if they are fans of this, you are too. If they believe that, you do too. Never taking a stand, always being agreeable, never standing out and speaking up about what truly matters to you. But we live as Christians in a world of absolute truths. Jesus is God and Man. The Bible is true, all of it. Jesus died for the sins of the entire world. There is no other God than the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are absolute truths. There is no wiggle room, and it is a personal question to ask, “Do you believe Jesus is truly the Christ?” Do you believe the Bible is true? All of it? Do you believe Jesus died for the sins of the entire world? Do you believe that there is no there is no other God than the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Now you won’t find a quiz that you have to publicly answer these questions in your bulletin, and sign your name to it, this isn’t a place of interrogation, but you do have to answer these questions in your heart when it comes to your faith. And if you answer them truthfully, as the Bible presents these truths, then you have to publicly confess them as your beliefs. And we fail at that. We fail at that charge, that responsibility. We fade. We conform. We hide. But a key is a personal thing, and so is our faith, and so is our relationship to God. There is no hiding.

The key turns and locks, your sinfulness remains, but only in unrepentance. Only to deny God personally. To shut yourself off from this relationship between you and the Almighty God, you and His Son Jesus Christ. The comfort you can have, is that in the moments of weakness, of hesitancy and hiding, we who come to God’s altar seeking forgiveness are given just that. Freely, willingly and excited from our loving God. There is no Hollywood set up where you are unsure if the key will unlock or lock your heart to peace and comfort or eternal imprisonment. This isn’t a high stakes moment of suspense. You are forgiven. You are restored. You are given life and enthusiasm to go out and serve the Lord wherever He has called and planted you in your life. This Jesus Christ, who gives the keys, loves you. Enough to suffer for you. Enough to die for you. Enough to give his body and his blood for you to eat and drink for the forgiveness of your sins. Enough to get you through the hardships of your life and strengthen you until you are with him and your faith is realized for all eternity in his presence.

Sometimes we hear about moments in a feud or a squabble between people or teams and it’s said that “now it’s personal.” Well, it’s foolish to think that it can’t be personal with God. Your family name doesn’t matter, your family’s history in the faith or out of it doesn’t matter. It’s personal between you and God, between you and Jesus. This personal relationship isn’t something to fear, like a job interview or as we put it earlier, some kind of interrogation. This is a joyful relationship, a truth that gives comfort. God knows you personally, and loves you. Yes, you, your name, who you really are. He came to save you, yes you are saved in being part of “the world” but specifically God knows your name, and sent his son to die for you. May that give you comfort and peace to face this world, to fight the desire and temptation to conform and blend in, and to boldly confess the name of Jesus Christ, the rock of the Church, the foundation of what we believe to those around you, without fear, knowing that God loves you.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.