

Matthew 16:13-20  
St Mark – August 27, 2023  
The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
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### **Who do you say that I am**

The Bible is a really big book and is often overwhelming. Even for those who have been reading from it for a long time. Most quickly see that it's really lots of books combined together. The word "Bible" comes from a Greek word meaning, "The books".

Even though these books seem to be separate one from another, they are connected. They tell the story of who we are and to whom we belong. They give us meaning.

Today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew continues the story of Jesus and his divinity and it also continues the story of Simon Peter and his humanity. It tells the story of his failings and triumphs.

One of the Old Testament readings appointed for today begins the story of Moses. Moses who was quite like Peter. Moses and Peter are quite like others we read about in the Bible.

For example, David's life told in the second book of Samuel gives more examples of human failure being overcome by faith. Faith in and commitment to God.

Moses and David share the story of mortals doing the life-saving work of God in extraordinary ways and they share the story of human failure. Moses and David are not alone in their stories of strength and weakness.

The lives of Moses, David, and Peter tell of how those chosen by God are not perfect. They tell of how God's chosen are persistent. God's chosen are faithful and they do not give up.

Our assigned readings for today pair the story of Moses with this most striking story of Peter. Both men were chosen by God to lead His people away from Evil. both were chosen by God to lead His people toward His promise of salvation. Moses by the Father and Peter by Jesus.

Both Moses and Peter struggled with their weakness and fell short of God's calling and they failed to do His will and then... (and this is the most important part of the story) they didn't let their failings be the end of their story. They returned to God. Repenting of their sin.

They became more committed to God they clung to God as they did the work He gave them to do.

The stories of Moses and David are also the story of Peter.

Just as the stories of Moses, David, and Peter are the stories of us. They are about our humanity. They are about our human frailty and about our ability to turn that frailty around. With God's help. God's help that is always there for the asking.

Who among us hasn't failed God?

It's what we do next that matters and that relies on how we answer a question. In this morning's reading we hear Jesus ask the most important question ever asked,

“Who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered,

“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Peter's answer defined him. At the most basic level his answer and his commitment to living into his answer is the only thing that defined him.

Our answer to Jesus' most important question,

“Who do you say that I am?”

defines us as well. Our answer to this question and our commitment to living into our answer, in the end, is the only thing that will define us.

All the labels we assign to ourselves, all the labels that others place on us are without meaning to Jesus.

Where we were born, our political beliefs, how many years we've lived in this life, what schools we attended, none of that defines us in the eyes of our Lord.

Who is Jesus? How do we answer that question?

Like Peter, today I answer, "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus is my Lord and Savior. Jesus is my rock and my redeemer. Jesus is my strength, Jesus is my true friend in the depths of my sadness and in my greatest joy.

I pray that we will always have the strength of conviction, that we will always have the faith to never lose sight of Jesus. I pray that when we fail to do God's will we will return with humble repentance to Jesus, the Son of the Living God.

Peter had the Son of the Living God with him, physically, for several years. Peter watched the story unfold before him. Our knowledge comes from study, reason, and faith. Faith being the most important element for most of us.

Last week Bill reminded us that while "faith" is but one small word, faith is our firm foundation.

Only God is capable of stirring our souls and kindling faith within us, faith in what has been true since the beginning. Faith in what has been true since the beginning of time and the beginning of each of us.

Our responsibility to God is to feel and hear His stirring and to respond with curiosity. Curiosity that leads us to study and leads us to Christian community. Peter listened to God and his curiosity led him to Jesus.

Peter knows who Jesus is. He heard the voice in the cloud claiming Jesus and affirming his authority and Peter witnessed Jesus' appearing and disappearing after His resurrection. Peter clung to Jesus both physically and spiritually for years and his clinging increased as Peter lived out his life serving Jesus in extraordinary ways.

We are called to do that too. As we cling to Jesus we may be surprised at what we can do.

My most favorite closing to Morning Prayer comes from the third chapter of Ephesians. It reads,

“Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine...”

Through Christ all things are possible. In the Body of Christ, we can do infinitely more than we ever imagined.

To live into this truth, it is essential that we are together. It is essential that we worship together, that we study his teaching together. It essential that we pray together.

We have opportunities to do all these things. It is our responsibility to take advantage of them. It is essential because we are the body of Christ and only together are we whole. Only together are we able to do all that we are called to do.

Jesus asks,

“Who do you say that I am?”

May our answer always be, “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

May we never falter from proclaiming Him. May we never falter from clinging to Him; as our very lives, our very souls depend on it.