

August 27, 2017

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 16:13-20

13 When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

17 Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. 18 And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Messiah.

Background:

The gospel from last week described Jesus' travel to the pagan region of Tyre and Sidon and his encounter with a Canaanite woman there. After that encounter, Matthew reports that Jesus returned to the Jewish region and the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Great numbers of people follow him into the mountains, where he cures the lame, the blind, and others. After the crowd has been with them for three days, Jesus once again tells the disciples to give them something to eat. They have only seven loaves and a few fish. Jesus has the crowd recline on the grass, and he blesses the bread and has the disciples once again distribute it to the crowd, and then he has them collect what is left. This time seven baskets full of leftovers are collected. The crowd having been dismissed, Jesus and the disciples get into a boat and make their way to the district of Magadan where he encounters Pharisees and Sadducees who ask him to produce a sign from heaven. Jesus leaves them without responding to their request. When they get to the other side of the sea, Jesus tells the disciples to be aware of the leaven of the Sadducees and Pharisees. Because the disciples have forgotten to bring bread for the trip, they presume Jesus is talking about the leaven for bread. Jesus means the leaven of the Sadducees and Pharisees' teaching. All this leads to the Gospel text for this week.

Like this week's text from Matthew, Mark's gospel also recounts an occasion when Jesus asks the same questions that are posed here. (Mark 8:27-29) In Mark's account, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, but not that he is the "Son of the Living God." Also in Mark, Jesus does not comment on Peter's profession of faith, but he tells the disciples not to speak to others of what they have heard. Then Jesus speaks to them for the first time of his passion and death. Peter, hearing this for the first time, responds by taking Jesus aside and voicing some objection to what Jesus is saying. Jesus replies by telling Peter to "Get behind me Satan, you are not thinking as God does, but as human beings do." (Mark 8:33b) Mark's account is powerful, but the reader will benefit from keeping the two accounts separate. Matthew's account presents its own insight into Jesus' ministry and its own invitation for our response.

As the reader reflects on this gospel, it will be helpful to be aware that people from Mediterranean cultures have a very different sense of themselves than most westerners. They are “other”-orientated to the extent that they may not have a sense of who they are apart from their family or clan. From this perspective, Jesus is not quizzing his disciples to see if they know his true identity, but he is really trying to sort out for himself who he is. There are other passages in the gospels where the importance of this group identity surfaces. Jesus’ opponents write him off as being from Nazareth. They operate under the presumption that to know his family and where he comes from is sufficient to know the individual. Jesus too, as person of his day, would be working out of the same mindset. From his perspective, his question is a natural part of his search to understand who he is.

Reflection Questions:

1. Are you a person who values your independence?
2. Have you ever had to go against the wishes of family or friends to pursue your goals?
3. Has there been a period when you were searching for direction or even discovered you were not happy with the direction your life was heading?
4. When you hear Jesus ask the disciples who people are saying that he is, how do you relate to that question? What feelings does that question invoke in you?
5. If Jesus asked you who you say that he is, how would you respond?
6. What do you think Peter felt when he heard Jesus say: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"?
7. Can you ask Jesus who he says you are? How do you hear Jesus responding?
8. Can you talk with Jesus about his response?

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Excerpts from the readings for August 27, 2017, the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thus says the Lord to Shebna, master of the palace:

"I will thrust you from your office and pull you down from your station.

On that day I will summon my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah;
I will clothe him with your robe, and gird him with your sash, and give over to him your authority.
He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah.
I will place the key of the House of David on Eliakim's shoulder;
when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open.
I will fix him like a peg in a sure spot, to be a place of honor for his family."

Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.
I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with all my heart, for you have heard the words of my mouth;
in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise; I will worship at your holy temple.
I will give thanks to your name, because of your kindness and your truth:
When I called, you answered me; you built up strength within me.
The Lord is exalted, yet the lowly he sees, and the proud he knows from afar.
Your kindness, O Lord, endures forever; forsake not the work of your hands.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!
For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor?
Or who has given the Lord anything that he may be repaid?
For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples,
"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"
They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah,
still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."
He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.
For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.
And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church,
and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.
I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.
Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven;
and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Excerpts from Isaiah 22:19-23; Psalm 138:1-3, 6, 8; Romans 11:33-36; and Matthew 16:13-20

