

## **SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON**

Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost

August 23, 2020

### **Psalm: Psalm 138:1–8 (ESV):**

1 I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;  
before the gods I sing your praise;

2 I bow down toward your holy temple  
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness,  
for you have exalted above all things  
your name and your word.

3 On the day I called, you answered me;  
my strength of soul you increased.

4 All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD,  
for they have heard the words of your mouth,

5 and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,  
for great is the glory of the LORD.

6 For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly,  
but the haughty he knows from afar.

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble,  
you preserve my life;  
you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies,  
and your right hand delivers me.

8 The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;  
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.  
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

### **Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 51:1–6 (ESV):**

**51** “Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,  
you who seek the LORD:  
look to the rock from which you were hewn,

and to the quarry from which you were dug.

2 Look to Abraham your father  
and to Sarah who bore you;  
for he was but one when I called him,  
that I might bless him and multiply him.

3 For the LORD comforts Zion;  
he comforts all her waste places  
and makes her wilderness like Eden,  
her desert like the garden of the LORD;  
joy and gladness will be found in her,  
thanksgiving and the voice of song.

4 "Give attention to me, my people,  
and give ear to me, my nation;  
for a law will go out from me,  
and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples.

5 My righteousness draws near,  
my salvation has gone out,  
and my arms will judge the peoples;  
the coastlands hope for me,  
and for my arm they wait.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens,  
and look at the earth beneath;  
for the heavens vanish like smoke,  
the earth will wear out like a garment,  
and they who dwell in it will die in like manner;  
but my salvation will be forever,  
and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

**EPISTLE: Romans 11:33–12:8 (ESV):**

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?”

35 “Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?”

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.  
Amen.

12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your  
bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual  
worship. 2 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.

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself  
more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each  
according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we  
have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we,  
though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.  
6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if  
prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who  
teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who  
contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of  
mercy, with cheerfulness.

#### **THE GOSPEL: Matthew 16:13–20 (ESV):**

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his  
disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say  
John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”  
15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You  
are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are  
you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my  
Father who is in heaven. 18 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. 19 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.” 20 Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

## **Sermon 32 – Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost**

**“Platinum”**

**Matthew 16:13-20**

Dear friends,

Our Gospel lesson this morning shows us a valuable pivot point in Jesus' ministry, where He turns from one important thing to another important thing. As a moment of transition, I want to look at what Jesus says, what Peter says, and try to learn from them both. Jesus asks a question, Peter gives the answer, Jesus builds on what Peter says. This is a tennis ball of awesome truth being batted between these two parties and it is positively great to see, even though the content of both confession and answer seem somewhat mundane. The questions I want you to ask are these: What is a confession of faith, what is a good confession of faith, and finally what is *your* confession of faith?

We could easily answer all three of those questions with the creeds that we say every Sunday, but that's kind of a shortcut. Let's take the long way instead. A few notes on the pivot point, the context. Jesus is turning from His ministry of preaching and teaching the broad strokes of the truth toward the Cross. What He's doing is finishing His loop toward Jerusalem so that He can do His work there and be crucified. What He's saying on the way changes too, Jesus starts talking more about endings, about the urgency of the need for repentance, about His death and about what that means. So Jesus is changing direction and topic, and this is where the change comes, which I think is significant.

**“13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”** Why this question? Could be Jesus is leading up to the next one. That's probably the case, but

I don't want to throw these statements away. There was a lot of argument and written thoughts on all these, and frankly they would take forever, but suffice it to say that there was a sequence of people around the New Testament Messiah. People were trying to line up the sequence based on what happened around them. In essence, the people of Israel were trying to figure out who Jesus was, who the Messiah was in general, and Jesus is using this general uncertainty about the topic as a moment to teach them. For you, this question is incredibly, pedantically clear, but we have the benefit of both faith and hindsight to make it so. Of course Jesus is the Messiah. But this wasn't so clear to them.

He's asking them what a confession of faith is. What are people saying, because based on what people are saying, you can at least make some reasonable inferences about what people are actually believing. The disciples give Jesus the standard list of choices, and from them you see the uncertainty of the people and their faith. That is probably a harsh thing to say, it's not meant to be, but uncertainty of faith is always something that plagues us on this Earth. We know who Jesus is, we know He is up there, but I will eat my boots if you haven't at least doubted some of the things about Him over the years. We all suffer this. What is the solution?

**“15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** Jesus then gets personal. Who do y'all say that I am? Peter as he does speaks for the disciples and makes the good confession to put it mildly. Peter's statement is both simple and very specific, and that's what makes a good statement of faith: Simplicity and specificity. A standout example of simplicity would be this statement or the Apostle's Creed. A standout example of specificity would be the Athanasian Creed. It somewhat falls short on our standards of what constitutes simple, but the Athanasian Creed shows us exactly who God is NOT, and does a fine job of it. To say what you believe is the very heart of what the end result of our faith is supposed to be. You learn it, then you say it. That's what we make our kids do. And both of those are the weapon we have to combat doubt.

Learning, believing, and saying. Those are the only weapons the church has ever used, our kindness in good works perhaps, but those are the main ones. That is what

church is intended to do, a place for you to learn, to believe, and to say. By learning, you have facts and opinions both to help you deal with doubt or the devil's attacks. By believing, you have the gifts that Jesus gives you, that you are His child, part of His family, and that He loves you so much He will not have you live in sin but will instead suffer crucifixion and death to rescue you from it. By saying, you reinforce them both, building them up. There is a reason, as silly as this sounds, that talking yourself into doing something or being something happens sometimes. That is precisely what Christ does to you. He talks you into eternal life, by promising things to you, sending His reassurances through His servants in the Bible, and so on.

Back to Peter. What is Peter doing? He's doing just that. He is plainly and clearly describing who Jesus is, and saying that this is what he believes. Jesus seems quite galvanized by this. **“17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 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 says, bam Peter, you nailed it, and you will nail it again. And again. Until they nail you to your own cross, Peter, you are going to keep nailing it, because my Father in heaven is the one behind all this. Jesus is complimenting Peter, but He's also complimenting God the Father's work through Peter, and if that is confusing you're not alone I can't explain it that's just God. Point is, Jesus' words here should comfort and reassure you. Why? Because Christ built His church upon a rock, Peter. If you read Acts, Peter goes on to do some very reckless and wonderfully faithful things with the mission Jesus gives him. You can trust this thing that we have here folks, and this is Jesus reminding you of that. We didn't make this up. Peter didn't make this up. This isn't fancy, pretend, or even the lies we tell ourselves to make this world seem less bad. This is history, and it plays out exactly as Jesus describes here. Christ built His church on Peter, and the gates of hell cannot, have not, and will not prevail. We're here now because of that rock, because of Peter's confession of faith, His learning of that same faith, and His saying of that faith to others. It all comes back to Peter, who gets it from Jesus. There's

an unbroken relay chain of truth in everything we do and say here, and this is where it starts, which is why we can rely on it to be true even when it seems like utter foolishness.

This is exactly what Jesus says to the whole group next. **“19 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.”** The church's whole reason for existence is to repeat, learn, and repeat again Peter's confession of faith. We have the Christ, the son of the living God, His name is Jesus, here is what He did for us. By that, heaven is opened to us. By that, we are freed from the fear of death and hell. By that our sins are forgiven, our lives have a point, and our God looks at us kindly. The church is the gatekeeper, but the key is the forgiveness that Jesus won on the cross. We're here to unlock people from their fear, from their sin, and we do that by confessing and repeating the same thing that Peter said.

So I ask you again, what is your confession? I presume it is this, that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, otherwise you wouldn't be here. What can that confession do for you? It's not an empty recital, and by gum does it feel like it sometimes. It is not the repeating of data that is already known. It's not even a statement of intent, like the pledge of allegiance for Christians or something like that. This is the heart and soul of who you are and what you have. You are Christian. You believe in Jesus the Christ, the son of the living God. You believe that He has set you free from sin and death, and He has. You believe that once did what He did, which He did. You believe that He will come again, which He will. These words steel your soul, they reinforce your faith. They are your faith. Treasure these words. Write them down. Mutter them creepily to yourself. God's Word have power, they make things real from thin air. They make faithful hearts by getting hung up on them, gnawing at them like a dog with a bone. This week, fixate, obsess, set yourself the task of remembering Peter's simple, one-sentence creed. You have the Christ, the son of the living God.

Amen