

Sermon
Pentecost 12 Year A

Matthew 16:13-20

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, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 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. 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. 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.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

Open our eyes so that, even in these Virus days, we can clearly see the work you are calling us to do, to create in Killeen, a place where families are safe, happy and well educated. Amen

Sermon:

Today's gospel is awfully familiar to most of us.

Sometimes I wonder if it's too familiar.

We think we know what it means because we've heard it so often.

But what was Jesus really saying?ⁱ

The Gospel tells us that Jesus and his guys were

in a region called "Caesarea Philippi".

Back then that region was associated with the god Pan,ⁱⁱ

And was sometimes called Caesarea Panion.ⁱⁱⁱ

Our word "panic" comes from the Greek god Pan.^{iv}

Whether you call that area "Caesarea Philippi" or Caesarea Panion,

It wasn't considered a safe place.

When you think of the Greek word *Panikos*,^v

Think about scary sounds.

Strange noises in the woods at night.

Rattling cans. Strange voices. Odd bird calls.

Think of the sound of metal screeching,

as a ship twists in the waves.

The bitter smell of oily smoke and sweat and fear.

Caesarea Panion may have been that kind of a scary place.

To get to creepy Caesarea Panion,

from their safe place at the Sea of Galilee^{vi},

Jesus and his disciples walked 25 miles

A very long walk...

Jesus took his guys way outside their comfort zone.

But isn't that how Jesus works?

Jesus often calls us outside our comfort zone!^{vii}

In English, Jesus said:

“... I tell you, you are Peter,

And on this rock, I will build my church”

500 hundred years ago, people willingly killed other people and
people willingly died, in endless battles,
over Jesus' comment about "The Rock".

Today, there are still huge questions about
What Jesus meant when he mentioned "The Rock"?

Was Peter a Rock? Was Peter The Rock?
What or who else was a Rock?
Who is the Rock's successor? Does it really matter?

"I tell you, you are Peter (a smaller rock)^{viii},
And on this (bigger) rock I will build my church"

Was Jesus giving absolute authority to one man?
Or to one man and his successors?
Or to men only, and never to a woman?

Was Jesus a sexist? Was he simply a creature of his time?

Was the Rock, and the Church comment supposed to be
a rule for eternity? Or just for all of human time?

And what is time anyway?
Albert Einstein wanted to know!

We are Mere Humanity.^{ix}

Only briefly here on this green earth,
We are fragile, limited, and lonely.

We cling to the daylight.

We are easily frightened, are easily herded
and are constantly feuding.

But, in Jesus, God came to us as mere humanity.

Was Jesus naïve?

Did Jesus think that human beings could be trusted with
the Rock's virtually unlimited power and authority?

I think not.

When Jesus spoke of the Rock, did he intend to cede,
to mere humanity,
boundless power and authority?

Little in the Scriptures seem to say the answer is, "Yes".

Much seems to say, "No".

Today, we seem to be as easily bamboozled
as people were 21 centuries ago.

Jesus, a mere man, yet fully Divine, already knew that.

Jesus knew exactly who we were then and who we are now:

He never intended to give a nearly Divine authority,
to mere Humanity.

In reading about The Rock, we have, too often,
focused on the wrong words.

But Jesus never used his words carelessly.

Listen:

“You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church.
The gates of Hades^x will not prevail against it.”

“...the gates of Hades will not prevail” ... *What does a gate do?*

- A gate keeps trouble away.
- But a gate also keeps people and things locked in.

Like a prison.

We tend to focus on who has the power and authority.

But Jesus meant that the gates of Hell,
shall not imprison His Church.

Jesus meant that His Church is part of the Father’s plan
to break down the gates and barriers that people erect.

Jesus meant that His church would change the world,

And will break free of the world’s sad, limiting,
“Me First” culture of fear and loathing.

Jesus meant that His church^{xi} will set free those who are
trapped behind the gates of sin and loneliness and fear. ^{xii}

We are Jesus' Church. We are the rock.

With Jesus help, we break down the gates.

Right here. Right now.

Jesus calls us out of our safe places...

Our homes, our jobs, our careers, our titles.

Jesus calls us into the world to,

To help set people free.

To do the good work which shall endure.

We are Jesus church!

Whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven.

Whatever we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.^{xiii}

Jesus calls all of us^{xiv} out of our safe places and into the world.

Whoever we are. Wherever we are in our walk with Jesus.

Whatever we have or don't have. We are the Rock.

What is Jesus calling *you* to do, today?

AMEN

ⁱ And to whom? Was he speaking only to his disciples or was he intending to speak, “for the record”?

ⁱⁱ ... and before that, with Ba-Al (Hebrew לַעֲבַל, Ba'l, "lord"; Greek Βήλος)

ⁱⁱⁱ Caesarea Philippi, in Latin, "Philip's Caesarea", but in the Greek: Καισαρεία Φιλίππεια (Kaisareía Philíppeia), and in its early days, AKA, Paneas (Πανειάς), and a bit later Cesarea Paneas, it was adjacent to a spring and grotto, a sort of shrine to the Greek god Pan. Long abandoned it is near the Golan Heights. The surrounding region was sometimes known as known as the “Panion” (Πάνειον). See, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesarea_Philippi, and Brown, Peter (1971). *The World of Late Antiquity*. New York: W. W. Norton. ISBN 0-393-95803-5.

^{iv} And the Greek word “panikos”.

^v According to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, the Greek word *panikon* referred to "fear caused by Pan, panic," and was from *panikos* "relating to the fear caused by Pan," literally, "of Pan," from Pan, the name of a god of woods and shepherds. Think of a sudden overpowering fright especially without reasonable cause; also: extreme anxiousness, or a sudden widespread fright concerning financial affairs causing hurried selling and a sharp fall in prices. The ancient Greeks worshipped a god of pastures, flocks, and shepherds whom they named Pan. Pan was believed to be able to cause great fear at times. The people of Athens believed that it was Pan who had caused the Persians to flee in terror from the battle of Marathon. The Greek adjective *panikos*, was used to describe the sudden fear that Pan was thought to cause.

^{vi} Back then it was also known as Lake Gennesaret.

^{vii} And a hint of the Great Commission, in Matthew 28:19-20.

^{viii} Greek: Petra πέτρα, ας, ή. Is it a boulder, or a mountain of granite, or a chip off the old block? See, Strong's 4073 a large mass of rock, or any rock, ledge, cliff, cave, or stony ground. NB: Strong's 4073 πέτρα, is a feminine noun meaning a "a mass of connected rock," distinct from 4074 (Pétros) which is "a detached stone or boulder", possible small enough that a man might throw it.

^{ix} See, *Mere Humanity*: G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien, by Donald T. Williams.

^x Hades: ᾠδης hadēs, the god of the nether world.

^{xi} The church is God’s gathering or assembly, or ecclesia (ἐκκλησία), i.e., those called out by Him, form a safe place, such as their homes, into the world as one gathering. ek (out) and kaleo(called).

^{xii} That is, of course, all of us!

^{xiii} Whatever good work we do here – whether we bind sin or loose the Good News -- will be noted and preserved in heaven.

^{xiv} He calls ... Not merely his ordained people. Not merely those who serve the kingdom wearing a collar.