

## **August 27, 2023-Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

### **Introduction to themes for the day**

It was ‘gut check day’ for Jesus’ disciples. He asked the group, “who do YOU say that I am?” The moment is charged because of where it happens—Caesarea Philippi was a regional centre for the empire. The district featured statues venerating Roman and Greek gods. Jesus’ conversation and his followers’ declarations are very public—and political.

### **Gospel**

Matthew 16:13-20

13Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 17And 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. 18And 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. 19I 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.” 20Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

### **Sermon**

Peter’s words are spot on—Spirit inspired, Jesus tells him. You might already know why Jesus swears his apprentices to secrecy about his identity as Messiah. Rome isn’t going to like it. Some in the religious establishment will be very threatened. No sense borrowing tomorrow’s trouble when the disciples have so much to learn about what it means for them once they’ve publicly committed to Jesus as their Messiah.

The silence didn't last long—the disciples' response gave some guidance to a small movement trying to figure out who they were what what their place in the world was. That small group was the first to receive Matthew's Gospel—and not by incident or accident does Matthew use the word church to define God's calling together people to imitate Jesus in embodying God's love.

Today, I think the world yearns to hear the church's response to Jesus' question "Who do WE say he is?" It's the commitments, actions, and loyalties people want—and I say— need to hear.

Plenty has been written about how Christianity's 'brand', has taken a hit because we don't practice what we preach. In some egregious instances we preach intolerance and judgement and say we're showing people the way to Jesus.

This summer Lutherans and Anglicans from coast to coast to coast gathered in convention and they expressed what they say about what following Jesus looks like.

Afterward, Bishop Susan composed what she calls a very long list—tasks and commitments our church is making as we 'say who Jesus is' to a world wounded in many ways. The list appears in the most recent edition of *Canada Lutheran*. You can find print copies of the magazine or read on line. Reading might do your heart good and bring a tear to your eye.

Top of Bishop Susan's list—living into the apology the church made to the 2SLGBTQIA+community. Such living affirms that transgender rights are human rights. Such living confronts homophobia and transphobia.

The church resolves to push back against racism-especially inherent in our economic and social structures. The church intends to continue resisting white supremacy and other forms of racism.

The church expresses deep concern for a fragile planet—fragility expressed in floods, wildfires, storms, extinction of species and the famine and displacement that follow. The Lutheran church commits to becoming carbon neutral by 2050—

The list is longer and more detailed. Together the church enters into a period of discernment in selected a new National Bishop—and I'd say celebrating our present one. We will soon celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of ordination of women and celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the council of Nicaea—you know, the one where the creed we say on festival days comes from and was another response to Jesus questions..."but you, who do You say that I am."

When we answer Jesus' question about who we believe him to be, we aren't a lone voice crying in the wilderness. When we falter, others speak up and act justly. Sometimes we might be the ones who encourage others as we proclaim together...and as we seek to practice what we preach and proclaim.

The Messiah, the Son of the Living God embodies God's unshakeable love for everyone and for all of creation.

