

## Pentecost 14; September 6, 2020

### Matthew 16:13-20

It was the first day of school. The school had asked all of the parents to send their child to school with a name tag displayed around their neck. The front side was a bright color. The back of the name tag was white. As the students arrived to school on that first day, the teacher greeted each of her students by their name that she saw on the front of their name tag. Over the years, she had seen quite a number of different names. She had learned a long time before that it wasn't her place to judge a name. So, it was with *"Fruit Stand."*

Throughout the day, the teacher went around the room asking each student questions about themselves, asking them to solve a problem on the board or casually engaging them with the rest of the class. The teacher worked a bit harder with little *"Fruit Stand"* because he seemed to give her a strange look every time she called his name and was very shy when asked to do anything or speak in front of the class.

At the end of the day, the teacher was to send off each student to a specific location along the street in front of the school. In order to help their child get on the right bus, the parents were to write on the back of the name tag the location of the where their children were to get on the bus to come home. When the teacher flipped over the name tag to see where *"Fruit Stand"* was to get on the bus, she then realized that the parents had written the name on the wrong side of the tag. The back side of the tag said one word – **"Anthony."** His name was **"Anthony,"** not **"Fruit Stand."**

What is in a name? Names are important. To illustrate that, think how much time new parents spend looking for the right name to give their child. Thankfully, Mary didn't have to worry about what name she would use for her first-born son. God took care of that as the angel had told Joseph: **"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."** The name of Jesus meant that God would save his people. That's what he had come to do. His name stated his mission in this world. Yet, in our text for this morning you get the sense that Jesus may be a little disappointed because many of the people still didn't understand why Jesus was on this earth. Some had misunderstood Jesus, and what he had come to do. Others didn't really care about him. Others didn't trust him. Others simply didn't want to believe that he had come to save the world from its sin.

But Jesus never forgot what his mission was in this world. The time was getting closer to when Jesus would carry out that mission. This morning, Jesus is going to spend a little time with his disciples. He wanted to make sure that they knew who he was. So, he asks them a simple question: **"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"** Jesus knew what people were saying. This is not an opinion poll. It is certainly not like a politician who wants to know if he needs to change his message or not. This is really a question that Jesus is asking his disciples to see where they are standing.

**"They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'"** If you look at this list of people, it's not a bad list to be included on. It's a pretty impressive list. Yet each person on that list has something in common. They were just men. They weren't God. For people to include Jesus on that list they were thinking that Jesus was just a man. They just didn't get it. I wonder how people today would answer that question: **"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"** But Jesus' point really wasn't to find out what people were saying about who Jesus was. He really was getting to the next question. On this day, Jesus wasn't talking about all the people out there. He looked his disciples right in the eyes and asked **"But what about you?"**

Then Peter answers that question with a powerful profession of faith. **"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."** Peter got it. What's in a name? **"You are the Messiah."** In that name that Peter says is the whole picture of salvation. Yes, Jesus was a man. But he was so much more than just a man. This was the Son of God who would rescue this world. He took on human flesh for you and me.

How does Jesus respond? **"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."** What does Jesus mean? Is he saying that Peter is such a great man that his church will be built on him? Did he mean that Peter had done so many great things that he had earned the position in the Church? You see, Peter's name mean *"Rock."* Does Jesus say to Peter that he will never fail? No. We all know how Peter falls flat on his face time after time. We're not different than Peter. There

are those days that we are ready to shout it from the mountain top - **"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."** Then there are those days that we are just like Peter: **"I don't know the man!"**

Jesus gives an amazing promise to his Church. **"And the gates of Hades will not overcome it."** First of all, Jesus is not saying that the Christian Church is taking a defensive position. He isn't saying here that the people in the Christian Church are safe behind some big gates. When Jesus describes the Christian Church here, he is talking about war. In other words, this is not a picture of the Church on defense. This is a picture of the Church on offense. Jesus is saying that the Church is attacking the gates of hell! He is not saying that believers in Jesus are in the fortress and are just holding off the attacks of the Devil. This is a picture of the Church assaulting the fortress of Hell. No one can stop it.

Were the disciples feeling a little overwhelmed? I'm sure they did. Do we feel a little overwhelmed? I think so. That's why Jesus gave the promise that he did. When we stand on the firm promises of God, the Devil loses. When we look at Jesus who crushed the head of Satan, we know we have that same Savior on our side. Why can we trust God? Because God has built his Church on the foundation of Jesus. How can we have confidence in that promise? Look to the cross. There on that Christ on Calvary we see Jesus blasting through the gates of Hell. Not even the Devil himself can stop him. That's why we can have confidence in that promise. Jesus has called us to storm the gates of Hell itself. God has promised us that we will win. That's why we can say with confidence: **"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."** Amen.