

## Walking with Jesus the King August 27, 2023

**Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church**

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*"Who is Jesus?"* So, this is really the key as we were walking through Matthew. We have one more week that we will walk through Matthew. We are going to do something completely different after Labor Day, so we have a couple more times to see what the disciples are doing as they walk alongside Jesus. And here, the central question is, *"Who is Jesus?"* We have gotten through 16 chapters of Matthew. There are only 28. They should know by now, shouldn't they? Alright, you figure as teachers, we think about going back to school, it is like by the time you get to October, the kids should know the schedule for the room. They should understand where they are supposed to be when they are supposed to be. They should know how things work in the classroom. There should not be any more of those growing pains like they are experiencing right now. That is the same place where the disciples are here. The disciples should know. They should understand.

And yet, we see, like us, that is not always the case. Jesus goes back down south from the north. He is coming back toward Jerusalem for that last, final time He is going to be there. And in Caesarea Philippi, this Greek city, He is still speaking with Gentiles. People are coming to Him. It is not quite this center of the Pharisees yet. But people are coming to Him from everywhere. They want to be healed. They want to see His goodness. They want to see what He is going to do next, what He is going to say next. Some of them want to see the Pharisees put in their place. Jesus asks His disciples, the twelve closest to Him, *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"*

And they repeat the things that they have heard from the crowd, the people who have been healed by Jesus. They say, "Well, you must be John the

Baptist because he came earlier, and he was baptizing people when they repented and forgave their sins.” Other people say, “Well, Jesus must be Elijah.” And that makes sense if you remember that people for centuries have been waiting for Elijah to return. They put on a chair during Passover and celebrations, the Elijah Chair, because one day he is going to come back, and he is going to bring God’s peace to the world. Is that Jesus? Others think maybe he is Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

Any idea what the prophets used to do in the Old Testament times? They used to speak to the kings of the time. And were they always very positive with the kings? They would say, “Well done, King. You’re doing a great job”? The prophets were not known for that. In fact, they were known for being killed by the kings because they would often tell the kings exactly what they did not want to hear. They would tell the kings, “Remember that you’re just sitting on the throne serving the Lord, who is the true king. Serve Him.”

These are what people are wondering. Could this be Jesus, all these different types of roles that He would play? And so, the question is, “*Who is Jesus?*” I heard the titles from today’s Message song, *Jesus Messiah*, but I want you to think a little bit more within your heart and your mind.

*Who is Jesus?* I bet that with your mind you can come up with some great titles like we did earlier. But who is He for you? How have you experienced His goodness? How have you experienced His presence? How have you experienced His salvation for you? Peter is going to be asked this. The disciples, all of them, are asked this. Jesus says to them, “*Who do you say that I am?*” And I am not sure right now if all of us here have an answer to that. In fact, I know at different times in our lives, we do not have an answer. We question. We wonder who Jesus is. Sometimes we do not quite trust exactly what He says as well. There are a lot of things in our lives that can point our hearts and minds away from Him. The sufferings, the doubts, the questions, the things that we just cannot

understand why they happened the way that they did. And we wonder in the midst of that, “*Who is Jesus?*” Jesus says to the disciples, “*Who am I?*” Simon Peter—unusually—gives the right answer. He says, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*”

And what do we know about Peter in our previous weeks? What does Peter usually do? When Peter tries to stand out from the crowd, from the disciples, what happens to him? He sinks in the water or says something really unfortunate. Peter never stands out in a way that is good. He is always trying to stand out to make himself look better than the disciples.

But here it is different. Peter replies with the right answer. “*You, Jesus, you are the Christ. You are the Son of the Living God.*” It is almost as if at this moment, Peter trusts that Jesus is who He says He is. And this hits at the heart of what we are going through today. I can stand up here and tell you all that you are greatly and dearly loved by God, that Jesus has saved you, that He loves you each and every day, and no matter how broken you are, no matter how much you have strayed from God, every time you turn around and see Him, He is right there. He loves you. He forgives you. That is all true, and that is all good news for each one of us, but sometimes it is hard for us to trust those promises. Do you trust that Jesus is who He says He is?

Jesus answers Peter and says, “*You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven did.*” What is this all about? Well, this is the answer to the question: *why did Peter get the answer right all of a sudden*—because it was not something special about Peter.

It was not that in the midst of his brokenness, in the midst of his unbelief, in the midst of his saying “*If it is you, Jesus*”, Peter all of a sudden just got everything right; his life just kind of fell into place; everything turned out the right way. That is not it at all. What Jesus is reminding Peter is that he was able to confess that Jesus is the Savior, the Christ, because he was

blessed by God to say this. It was not his flesh and blood, his mind, and his heart that drew him to do that. It was God Himself who blessed him with this faith through the power of the Holy Spirit to confess that Jesus is Lord. This is a sign given to Peter and to all the disciples who are watching this play out that the Spirit is working and active and there. They must have been thinking, *“Oh great, Peter is stepping out again. He is going to say something stupid.”* And then he does exactly the right thing.

Why was Peter given a sign? Well, this makes more sense if we know the context from where this passage is coming from. There are two books, I think, in the pews in front of you, right? One of them is a hymnal, and one of them is a Bible. It is okay to flip through the pages on there. It is not going to bother me. It is all good. Or use the Bible that is on your phone. If you did that, you would go back to the paragraph before this, and you would see that the Pharisees had just come to Jesus, and they are getting angry. They are getting frustrated. In fact, they have already started to make plans to try to do away with Jesus. And they finally give Him one last chance, like, *“Jesus, if you can just give us a sign from God, like the prophets of old, then we’ll believe in you.”* It is this “if, then” thing. It is almost like they think of God as a vending machine. Like if you put in those quarters or those dollars, then you’re going to press the right button, and then you’re going to get the thing out that you want. How does Jesus respond to them? He says, *“No. There will be no sign for you.”*

This is not how the kingdom of God works. It is not if you get your life right, if you get your mind right, and your heart right, if you clear yourself of all of your brokenness and sin, then come to God, and He’ll love you. That is not how this works. By blessing Peter with this faith, to be able to confess that Jesus is the Christ even before he understood what that truly meant, He was making a point that the kingdom of God is about grace. It is about coming into the midst of the brokenness, seeing the brokenness in all the world, and in all the people, and knowing that there is mercy to be had. There is salvation to be had because of Jesus alone. Peter, in his

humility, was given this blessing of faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now that helps us understand what comes next. Because Jesus then says, “*And I tell you, you are Peter.*” Do you know what Peter means in Greek? It means rock. “*And on this rock, I will build my church. And the gates of hell, Hades, will not prevail against it.*” In other words, death—the power of hell, the power of Hades—death has no power anymore.

How does death not have any power? Because Jesus actually defeats it. When does He defeat it? On Easter. Has that happened yet for the disciples? They have no idea. They have no idea that Easter is happening yet. So, when Jesus says, “*On this rock, I will build my church,*” He means something a little bit different.

“*On this rock*”, does He mean Peter specifically? I think we have covered that. There is nothing special about Peter. It was about God blessing him with the faith to confess the truth that Jesus is the Christ. That is the rock on which He is building something. That is the foundation of faith. It is not in a man. It is not in a *Peter*. It is on the foundation that is firm, that lasts across all generations, throughout all ages. Who is this firm foundation we speak of? It is Jesus. It is Jesus. We sing of that many times throughout the year too, do we not? On Jesus, we are going to do what? We are going to build.

Wait a second! *Who* is going to build? Is Pastor Tyson going to build? Nope, probably not. Is Pastor John going to build? Probably not. Is it you? Probably not. *Who* is it? Jesus is building. Jesus is the one active. He is the one making this happen. Again, He is pointing the disciples and Peter to Him.

And *what* is He actually actively building? The *ecclesia*, the church, the community, the people of God. This is what Jesus is focused on. He is focused on building a community of people who will then, by the power

of His Spirit, confess His truth, His name, His power, and His kingdom, in the whole world. Does it have anything to do with Peter? Only in the sense that God is going to use him to do these things. Does it have anything to do with you? Yes. In the sense that He is going to use you to do these things.

*“I will give you then,”* Jesus says, *“the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”* This sounds really important, doesn't it? *“And whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”* What does that mean? It sounds like he is giving power to Peter or to the church or something. What is this really all about? Well, what are the things of heaven? What happens in God's presence? What is God all about? What is the kingdom of God all about? What was Jesus doing as He went around the countryside? Well, when people came near Him, near the Kingdom of Heaven, what would happen to them? Their relationships would be restored. The brokenness would be healed. Their bodies would be put back together again. People who could not see would see. It was absolutely incredible. And then, Jesus would proclaim the goodness of God to all the earth. This is what He brings.

In our traditional Lutheran understanding, we also understand this specifically as one of the best things that He brings is forgiveness. So, the keys of the kingdom can be all about forgiveness. When your pastors come up here and we confess our sins, we know that because God is faithful and just, when we confess our sins, He is going to forgive us every single time. And your pastors get to say to you, *“I forgive you all of your sins”* to speak for God, because of this. Because one of the best things that God gives to you is the peace that passes such human understanding of true, deep, real forgiveness. No longer are you weighed down by the things of the week, and the ways in which you have been broken, or the ways that you suffer. But when you hear that forgiveness, I hope that that weight is just lifted off of you. That it is just gone. Because that is what it is. It is God's true forgiveness for you.

These are the things that you are given that are part of the kingdom of heaven. The reminder today is when we think about who Jesus is, when we are asked, “*Who am I?*”, we can think of Jesus as the king. He is the one true king, the one who brings His kingdom into this earth, the kingdom of heaven. And what is that kingdom all about? It is about bringing restoration. It is about bringing healing and hope. It is about helping people to focus on Jesus alone. He is the one who builds. He is the one who loves. He is the one who saves. And He brings that all to us.

Now, there is this weird part at the end. Jesus tells all the disciples who see this incredible thing to tell nobody about it. This seems opposite from what we know about everything. Why would He do this? What is the point of not telling everybody about the Christ? Here is a simple way to understand that—the disciples have not experienced Easter yet. We are blessed that we live on this side of Easter. We know that Jesus has been raised from the dead. We know that the tomb was empty. We know that we are given new life today and forever through His new life, but they did not know this yet. In fact, in the very next section, Peter is going to deny that that could ever possibly happen. So much for Peter knowing all the right answers. What one of my professors says in his commentary on this is that just for the moment, silence was appropriate. Nobody had any idea what Easter was going to be. But once they do, they are not going to be able to stop talking about it. They are not going to be able to stop telling people that Jesus has been raised from the dead. That there is life and forgiveness in Him, that He is, and always will be, and always has been, the Christ. Just for a moment. Easter is coming.

So, “*Who is Jesus?*” Jesus is the King—the King of the kingdom that is real around us—the kingdom of heaven that is made real as we as people, His people, His church, share His grace, His mercy, His peace, and His forgiveness with the people around us. In that way, they become part of the kingdom as well. In that way, they start to see Jesus, and when they are asked “*Who is Jesus?*”, how will they respond? Well, He is the Christ.

He is my Savior. He is the Messiah. He is the King. This is what we do.  
This is Church.

Let's pray as we close. *Heavenly Father, we thank you for Allowing us to focus on who you are today again. We thank you for blessing Peter by the power of your spirit to proclaim that you are the Christ. Today, let us do the same, except with Easter eyes, knowing that you have defeated death once and for all, and that right now, right here, even in the midst of the suffering that our sinfulness has brought in this world, that you are present, that you are with us, that you are bringing the things of your kingdom to bear right here on earth as it is in heaven. Allow us to be your people through which this grace and mercy and love and forgiveness can be made real to the people around us. Lord, in this way, allow so many more people to see you as the Christ and proclaim you as their King. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*