

12<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost (A) 8/23/20 youtube link:

TEXT: Matthew 16:13-20

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In today's GOSPEL

we see that Jesus and his disciples  
ventured into the District of Caesarea Philippi.

It is an area about 25 miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee.

The city of Caesarea Philippi lies at the foot of Mount Hermon.

It's a notable mountain range  
that straddles the current Syria-Lebanon border  
and is part of the Golan Heights.

The region had tremendous RELIGIOUS implications.

The place was littered with the temples of the SYRIAN gods.

There also was the influence of the GREEK gods  
...and long a place of worship of the Greek god Pan.

It was also a place of worship  
of the ROMAN Emperor Caesar... as a God HIMSELF.

There was an elaborate marble temple  
which had been erected by Herod the Great  
--father of the then ruling Herod Antipas.

So...you might say that the WORLD religions  
were on display in this town!

(pause)

Jesus was on his first and only trip OUTSIDE of Palestine.  
...and it was a CRITICAL moment in his life and ministry.

He was NEARING the END of his ministry.

Did his DISCIPLES understand WHO he WAS?

Were all his efforts over the last 3 years FRUITFUL?  
...or had it all been in VAIN?

This was a CRITICAL moment.

And critical MOMENTS...call for critical DECISIONS.  
(pause)

**I.) “*Who do people say that I am?*” ...Jesus asked.**

The disciples began sharing with Jesus  
what they heard from people:  
*“Some say that you are Elijah.  
Others say John the Baptist.  
Still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”*

That’s not surprising.

People see things DIFFERENTLY all the time!

It’s ALWAYS been this way.

And Jesus has ALWAYS been seen by people  
...in MANY different ways.  
(pause)

Well...when Jesus ASKED them...his disciples TOLD him  
what people were SAYING.

[A] ***“SOME say that you are ELIJAH.”***

Now WHY would people think that Jesus was the long-deceased prophet Elijah?

- 1.) Elijah was a highly revered personality in the religious life of the Hebrews.
- 2.) His defeat of the 450 prophets of Baal on the top of Mt. Carmel was a story well-known...even by little children.
- 3.) And when our Lord was transfigured...  
2 men from the PAST came back from the grave to speak to him  
--Moses...and Elijah!

ALL of these are GOOD reasons why people thought that Jesus was Elijah.

4.) But there was ANOTHER reason.

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In Charles Schultz's comic strip Peanuts...we see that the television is on...  
--but there is no one in the room.

The announcer is talking about a golf tournament that is in process.

He says:

*“Smith has to make this putt to win the championship.  
There will be no tomorrow.”*

And just as he says, *“There will be no tomorrow,”* ...IN walks LUCY.

She immediately goes into a PANIC

and starts running around and yelling to the other children:

*“The world is coming to an end!  
They just announced it on television!  
The world is coming to an end!”*

Her panic quickly spreads

...and we see ALL the Peanuts kids go wildly screaming about!

Finally in the last square  
we see all of the children huddled on top of Snoopy's doghouse  
waiting for the end of the world.

And Charlie Brown finally speaks up with a puzzled voice:  
*"I thought that Elijah was supposed to come back first."* ☺

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Well Charlie Brown knew his Bible! ☺

In the very last passage in the Old Testament  
the Book of Malachi contains these words:  
*"Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet  
before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes."*

Elijah was SUPPOSED to come back before the END TIME.

So the disciples heard people talking about Jesus  
thinking HE was ELIJAH returning ...as PROMISED!  
(pause)

[B] ***"But OTHERS say you are JOHN THE BAPTIST  
who has come back to life."*** ...the disciples told Jesus.

We remember that John the Baptist's career was cut short  
when he confronted Herod Antipas...the Tetrarch of Galilee...  
for sleeping with his brother's wife.

Herod had John beheaded for that.

But death SOON turned into MARTYRDOM  
--and John's POPULARITY among the people FLOURISHED!

Matthew 14:1 reports:  
*"When Herod heard of Jesus, he said to his servants:  
'This is John the Baptist who has been raised from the dead  
and that is why these great powers are at work in him.'* "

Herod HIMSELF believed  
that Jesus WAS John the Baptist reincarnated.

He though John had come BACK to GET him!

We can't help wonder  
if that was Herod's GUILTY CONSCIENCE speaking!  
(pause)

[C] *“Still OTHERS are saying that you are JEREMIAH.”*  
...the disciples told Jesus.

Now...why JEREMIAH?

To understand THIS... we have to know a little STORY.

The Jews believed that  
...BEFORE their ancestors were hauled off into captivity in Babylonia  
and the Ark of the Covenant was destroyed  
(...You remember the ARK from the 1<sup>st</sup> Indiana Jones movie  
*“Raiders of the Lost Ark”...that’s the one!...*)

...BEFORE their ancestors were hauled off into captivity in Babylonia  
and the Ark of the Covenant was destroyed

--JEREMIAH had SECRETLY  
...opened the ark  
...removed the altar of incense  
...and hidden it in a remote cave on Mount Nebo.

Just before the MESSIAH was supposed to COME...so the story went...  
Jeremiah would RETURN and PRODUCE this altar  
to the Glory of God!

Was this story TRUE?  
Probably NOT.

But many people BELIEVED it was TRUE.

And that BELIEF fueled the fire for SOME people  
to believe that Jesus WAS Jeremiah RETURNED to them.  
(pause)

So...ELIJAH...JOHN the BAPTIST...and JEREMIAH.

All 3 of these DESCRIPTIONS tell us  
that people thought Jesus was a GREAT and FAMOUS prophet!

They thought Jesus had COME  
to HERALD the COMING of the Messiah!

These were actually COMPLIMENTS...of the HIGHEST ORDER!  
(pause)

Jesus asked his disciples... *“Who do PEOPLE say that I am?”*

It WAS an IMPORTANT question.

But IT was NOT the most CRITICAL question!

And it is to THIS question that we now TURN.

**II.)** Jesus turned to his disciples... his most personal FRIENDS...  
...his inner CIRCLE...his trusted STUDENTS...  
and he asked them the most CRITICAL question:  
*“Who do YOU say that I am?”*

Ahhh...THAT's the QUESTION  
that everything TURNS on...ISN'T it? ☺

Jesus ASKED his disciples their PERSONAL opinions.

He said:

*“OK. I hear you.  
You’ve told me what OTHER people think.  
But NOW I want to know what YOU think!  
Who do YOU say that I am?”*

THAT’s the QUESTION  
that everything TURNS on...ISN’T it?

And the WORLD has always STRUGGLED  
with the answer to THAT question!

(pause)

Well... I wish I’d have been a FLY on the WALL in the room  
when Jesus ASKED ‘em THAT one! ☺

We DON’T really KNOW

--how LONG the SILENCE hung in the room!  
--how UNCOMFORTABLE everybody WAS!  
--what nervous TWITCHING and FIDGETING was going on!  
--what the REST of the disciples were thinking!  
--and how MANY of ‘em were saying to themselves  
... *“I sure hope he doesn’t expect ME to answer!”*

The Bible doesn’t TELL us.

But Matthew DOES tell us that PETER responded:

*“You are the MESSIAH...the Son of the Living God.”*

In OTHER words...Peter BOLDLY stepped out and DECLARED:

*“You’re the ONE...Jesus!  
It’s NOT about all these OTHER gods around here!  
It’s about the ONE...TRUE...LIVING God  
and about YOU!”*

And at THAT point...Jesus gave him a new name.  
“You are no longer CEPHAS,” ...Jesus said.  
“You are PETROS...the ROCK.”

And NOTHING was EVER to be the SAME for Peter again.

Coming to the REVELATION that Jesus WAS  
...the Christ...the Messiah...  
...HIS Christ...and HIS messiah...  
--CHANGED Peter’s life...FOREVER!

(pause)

**III.) Well...I would suggest that THIS is**  
**...the most URGENT...the most RELEVANT...**  
**...the most CRITICAL...and the most THEOLOGICAL question**  
**that confronts US.**

WHEREVER we TURN in life  
we are FACED with the IMPLICATIONS of this QUESTION.

In his book Mere Christianity...C.S. LEWIS addressed the inclination  
--to say nice things about Jesus...but to stop short of calling him God.

He WRITES,

*“I am here trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing  
that people often say about him:*

*‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher,  
but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’*

*“That is the ONE thing we must NOT say.”...Lewis STATES.*

He WARNS:

*“A man who was merely a man  
and said the sort of things that Jesus said  
would not be a great moral teacher.  
He would either be a lunatic  
...on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg...  
--or else he would be the Devil of Hell.*

*You must make your choice.*

*Either this man was...and is...the Son of God:  
-- or else a madman or something worse.”*

Lewis CONCLUDES:

*“You can shut him up for a fool  
you can spit at him and kill him as a demon  
--or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God.*

*But let us not come with any of that patronizing nonsense  
about his being a great human teacher.*

*He has not left that open to us.*

*Nor did he intend to.”*  
(pause)

Yes...Jesus IS

- the Messiah
- the Son of the Living god
- the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Holy Trinity
- our Lord and Savior.

But...WHAT do these titles mean to YOU...TODAY?

WHO is JESUS...to YOU?

Can YOU say:

*“Jesus is my HELPER...my GUIDE...my FRIEND...my GOD”?*

*“Jesus is my ROCK...my FORTRESS...my DELIVERER...  
...my JOY...the one I TRUST the MOST?”*

Simply put...the most CRITICAL question today is:

*“WHO is Jesus...to YOU?”*

How would YOU answer Jesus’ question?

**(pause)**

#### **IV.) Today’s Gospels is ALSO about the apostolic FOUNDATION of the CHURCH.**

**[A]** By faith...**PETER** was ABLE to MAKE his bold confession  
that he BELIEVED in Jesus AS  
...the Messiah...the Son of the Living God.

Jesus RESPONDED to Peter’s confession PROCLAIMING:

*“Peter...you are the ROCK.  
And UPON this rock I will **BUILD my CHURCH!**”*

He DID!

And over 2,000 years LATER

his church is STILL going...ALL over the WORLD!

**[B]** The Christian church...**OUR church**...was BUILT on a ROCK!  
CHURCH = “Ekklesia” = “Called Out People”

We are God’s people CALLED out FROM the world

--to be FED...NOURISHED...EMPOWERED...and SENT...  
back INTO the world and TELL people about JESUS!

THAT's our MISSION!  
THAT's our MESSAGE!

We are called together AS our Lord's church  
to GO and tell EVERYBODY...with our WORDS and our LIVES...  
--WHO Jesus IS...to US!

**[C] Our ANSWER may NOT make us POPULAR...this is TRUE.**

As Rev. LEONARD SWEET says:

*"You can speak of Jesus as prophet...a holy man...  
...a teacher...or spiritual leader...  
and few will object.*

*But speak of Him as Son of God...divine...  
...of the same nature as the Father...  
--and people will line up to express their disapproval."*

It's just NOT that COOL...nor "politically correct"...  
to BE a Christian in our world today.

In many ways...ours is STILL pretty much a PAGAN world...  
--and MANY people don't WANT to HEAR about Jesus! ☹  
**(PAUSE)**

Rev. KING DUNCAN gives us this closing STORY.

*"The state highway department in Pennsylvania  
once set out to build a BRIDGE  
...working from BOTH sides.*

*When the workers reached the MIDDLE of the WATERWAY,  
--they found they were 13 feet to one side of each other!*

*Albert Steinberg...writing in the Saturday Evening Post...  
explained that EACH crew of WORKERS  
had used its own REFERENCE POINT..*

*No WONDER they did NOT connect!"*

Duncan OBSERVES:

*“That's why there is so much chaos in our society today.  
Everyone's using their own reference point!”*

He states:

*“What we need is a universal reference point so that we can say,  
'Here!  
Here is how the good life is lived.’*

*For Christians ...there IS such a reference point.  
--and that is Jesus.”*

(pause)

With all of the STRESS...DISEASE...  
...DISCORD...and DIVISIONS pervading our world...  
--we are LIVING in a CRITICAL moment!

Critical MOMENTS...call for critical DECISIONS!

And PEOPLE are MAKING critical DECISIONS...  
--about WHO...or WHAT...they will BELIEVE in  
as their “GOD”!

There are many “gods” out there.

In many ways...ours is STILL pretty much a PAGAN world.

MONEY...FAME...FORTUNE...POWER...PRESTIGE...  
...various forms of SPIRITUALITY...CHARISMATIC charlatans...  
--ALL are CLAMMORING for people's ATTENTION!  
--ALL are ASKING for people's WORSHIP!

People NEED a Messiah...a Savior...a Comforter...a Guide...  
...a Reliable Common Reference Point...  
...and a personal RELATIONSHIP with God!

So... people NEED to HEAR about Jesus!

They NEED Jesus!

And it's our MISSION to SHARE him WITH them!

(pause)

Here are some QUESTIONS  
to help you PREPARE for your mission.

- \* WHEN and HOW did YOU  
first come to RECOGNIZE Jesus as YOUR Savior?
- \* WHEN did you first COME to BELIEVE in him?
- \* Who HELPED you to DO so?
- \* WHO and WHAT has helped you CONTINUE to believe in him?
  
- \* Who IS Jesus...to YOU...PERSONALLY?  
--that's the question.
- \* And...JUST as IMPORTANTLY...  
-- "*WHO might you SHARE your ANSWER to that question with  
...THIS week?*"

Keep your eyes open!



Jesus will SHOW you!

T.B.T.G.

**AMEN!**