

Rocks and Keys
Seattle First Baptist Church
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Matthew 16:13-20

Now 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.

Rumor and hearsay are frequently wrong, yet some people thrive on repeating what other people say. Real gossip mongers say, ***you have to bring a bone to get a bone***. And, it is not just women who like to repeat what others say, Amen! Brothers like to pass around a little dirt. Remember that game kids played called Telegraph? The first person would begin by saying, ***Mary had a little lamb. Its fleece was white as snow***. Then after 10 people repeat what they heard, it ends up being, ***Call me tonight and let's go see a show***. We can't always depend on what ***they*** say, because ***they*** are frequently wrong.

In our text today, Jesus wanted to know what ***others*** were saying about him. He wanted to know what ***they*** were saying—those outside the inner circle. Not that Jesus really cared what other people thought. But, he could use this occasion as a teaching moment. For, if the disciples cared too much about what others said about them, they would lose their focus, their courage, and eventually abandon their mission and their ministry.

And, that is true for us too. If we care too much about what others say, we will never be satisfied in our skin. If we care what others say about our hair, or our size, or our vocation, or the length of our skirts, or the color of our skin, we will be flip flopping every ten minutes.

The disciples were aware that **people** were talking about them and **they** were *really* talking about Jesus because of his teaching, preaching, and healing. People will talk about us even when we are doing the right things. Amen. The Rev. Dr. William Barber, president of the North Carolina NAACP and architect of Moral Mondays, wrote in ***Forward Together***, those who fight for justice and speak truth to power, always find themselves hated and hounded simply because they believe in the cause of righteousness and building a more just community. So even though Jesus was doing good things, just things, and righteous things, they were still talking about him.

The disciples shared with Jesus what they heard people say. They say you are John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Sounds to me, on this occasion they only shared the good things they heard. For, we have to admit, this wasn't bad company to be among. These were top tier prophetic leaders. The disciples didn't say aw man, they'r saying you're a poor pushy dude from Nazareth. No, the disciples said Jesus was regarded as one of the giants of their faith. If someone included me in the company of Oprah, Beyoncé, Maxine Waters, or Michelle Obama, I'd just say thank you very much and then take them to lunch!

But Jesus wasn't satisfied with group think, or with what the masses thought, or what **they** said. Jesus frequently pushed beyond the margins and asked hard questions. So he asked his disciples, but what do you (plural) say? I imagine there was dead silence until Peter had the courage to speak up and say, you are the Messiah, the (Firstborn Inclusive Bible) Son of the Living God.

We live in an era where we are greatly influenced by what others think, or by what we read on the internet—thinking if it is on the internet it must be true. And, we are influenced by what we watch on TV.

I think, at times, we have gotten lazy and don't want to think for ourselves. So we get comfortable parroting what others say—what **they** say. Some things I hear Christians parrot don't even make sense in the 21st century. The ban on transpeople in the military makes no sense in the 21st century. White supremacy and white nationalism makes no sense in the 21st century. Saying global warming is a hoax makes no sense in the 21st century in the light of scientific evidence to the contrary. Shutting down the government in order to fund a wall on the US/ Mexican border makes no sense in the 21st century. Sometimes I want to scream, and say use your brains people and think for yourselves!

Yes, in order to form our own opinions, we may have to do some work. We may have to research an issue or read a book, or a journal. We may have to talk with people we don't usually speak with, but it is important to think for ourselves and not just follow the crowd. What do **you** think, Jesus asked?

Simon Peter said, you are the Messiah, the son (firstborn) of the Living God. Jesus said, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but God in heaven has given you this insight. And Peter, it is upon your faith that I will build my church. Peter, you will be the rock of this called out community and the gates of hell will not overtake it. No matter what trials come your way, the church will stand. The faith of this band of believers will survive.

It take a gifted person to be a good spiritual leader. It takes confidence, the willingness to learn, the ability to listen, and one with a heart who can empathize with God's people. Peter wasn't perfect, but he was available. God can and will use us when we are available—warts and all. Peter was a rock for that new fledging community. He was solid and grounded, and kept the church moving forward in spite of trials and tribulations. Others depended on Peter when the going got rough.

There are times that we need a rock to shore up our faith and keep us moving in the right direction. Yes, Jesus is the ultimate rock or the chief cornerstone, but sometimes I need the faithful rock of a sister or brother I can talk with to encourage me. Pastor Tim is a rock for many of us. Like Peter, he is not perfect, but he is available to be used by God for God's purpose. My spouse Renee is my rock when my faith gets a little shaky or there is a spider crawling across the floor that I want her to get rid of. You may have a rock on your job. Someone who is a solid go to person when things get confusing and don't make sense. I have a couple of rocks at the gym that keep me focused and grounded on that treadmill and elliptical when I would rather be at Starbucks sipping a double chocolate chip frappuccino with extra whip. We need our rocks to keep us grounded and hold us accountable.

And, we can be someone else's rock. If we make ourselves available to be used by God, God will bring others to us who need a listening ear, or a word of encouragement, or to be pointed in the right directions. So whose rock are you today? Our world is hungry for people who are solid in their faith, grounded in justice making, and committed to sharing words of kindness and hope. So whose rock are you?

Jesus told Simon, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and nothing will be able to overtake you. Remember, you and God are always a majority. It doesn't matter what the numbers say. Amen.

Then Jesus went further and said to Peter, I give you the keys of the reign of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. That is incredible authority and responsibility that Jesus gave Peter and not just Peter, but the entire faith community of Jesus. For in Matthew 18, Jesus gave that same commission to all his followers. If we bind hatred on earth, it won't exist any where else. if we bind spouse abuse, child abuse on earth, it won't exist in heaven. We have the authority and the responsibility to bind fear, hatred, racism, sexism, classism, transphobia, colorism, religious intolerance, and environmental ignorance.

What we bind on earth will be bound in heaven and what we loose on earth will be loosed even in heaven—love, grace, mercy, acceptance, joy, forgiveness, patience, kindness, gentleness, and peace. These need to be unleashed in every town and village—on every street and boulevard—and on every hill and mountain. We have the power to heal broken hearts, broken bodies, and broken spirits.

We must not give our power away. And we must hold accountable those who misuse their power. The world is depending on us to make a difference. Heaven and earth are depending on us to speak truth to power. We have the keys to make the realm of this world be the realm of our God.

The words to our closing hymn reads, Loving puts us on our knees, showing our faith by our deeds, serving the neighbors we have from you. Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love show us how to serve the neighbor we have from you.

Please stand as you are able and sing #498 Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love.