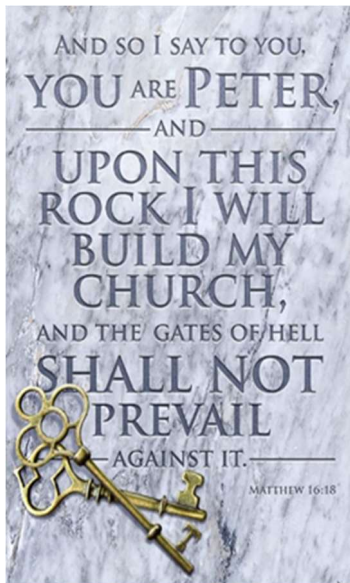


Pentecost 12-August 23, 2020
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Matthew 16:13-20

“What Rock?”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad



Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“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.”

*This 16th Chapter in Matthew contains the most important words for a church to hear. Jesus tells us what the solid foundation on which his church is to be built. These words are helpful for us today as the church does not look the same today and may never look exactly the same as it did several months ago when the pandemic began and we closed the doors to “in building” worship. We have had to ask ourselves, “What must the church continue to do?” And “What isn’t essential for the church to still be the church?” Jesus tells us in these words **the rock** on which all churches are to be built. Without this solid foundation that Jesus describes, the church is only founded on shifting sand.*

*I went to our outdoor patio last Sunday afternoon to read this scripture as I started planning this week’s service. Our patio is made from many rocks. At the center of the patio is a circle with a fire pit. To build this 20-foot circle of stones, I had to follow directions of placing the right stone in each ring with the correct angles to complete the circle. Since it is made from stones, it appears to be very solid. There is a curved rock wall built on the outside edge of the circle built with even heavier stones that appears to be immovable. However, as I sat on this solid stone patio, I was reminded of the base that these stones were built on as I noticed the grass and weeds that were emerging through the cracks between these stones. Under these solid stones is a foundation of sand. What appears to be so solid is deceiving because you cannot see the foundation on which the stones are laid. In the scripture for today, Jesus tells us what **the rock** is that is the foundation of his church. But just as there were many answers to Jesus’ question “Who do people say that I am?”, we seem to have many ideas about what **this rock** is that is the foundation for the church.*

*One of the conclusions that churches make is that the rock that Jesus was talking about was Peter himself. It certainly makes some sense since Peter’s name Petros means “rock”. It makes sense since after Jesus asked his disciples “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” and when they gave answers like John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets it was Peter who was commended by Jesus for saying, “You are Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” And right after giving what sounds like the right answer, Jesus indeed says, “You are Peter, and on **this rock**, I will build my church.” But Jesus quickly tells Peter that this answer came from God in heaven himself. The words that came out of Peter’s mouth were only possible because they had entered Peter from hearing it. Peter’s faith was created in him from the outside. I think the picture of Peter that is above the altar at Baltic or is on the stained glass window at East sinking in the Sea of Galilee and*

being pulled out by Jesus also is a good visual of how firm a foundation Peter is for building a church on. Jesus said he was going to build his church on "this rock". If Jesus was going to build his church on the someone who had sure footing, Jesus would not have picked Peter.

So, if the rock isn't Peter, maybe Jesus was referring to the place where two or three are gathered. Maybe the rock that Jesus built his church is the building that we worship in. I am thankful that someone took this picture of when East Nidaros was being built by carefully fitting one granite stone to another. "Built on a Rock" is a great mission statement for a church, but as we know the rock that Jesus was talking about is not the buildings, we worship in.

The rock that Jesus built his church on is found in the picture selected for bulletin cover for today. The foundation of the church are the keys to the kingdom of heaven. And the keys to the kingdom of heaven are none other than the keys that forgive sin.

In this passage from Matthew for today, it sounds like Peter was given the only set of keys. It sounded like the keys that Peter received had "do not duplicate" engraved on them. At this time in Jesus' ministry, Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah even though Peter had correctly named him the Messiah. But no one was yet able to understand how Jesus was going to save his chosen people, so he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone.

On Easter morning, the secret to the kingdom of heaven was no longer a secret. Jesus had overcome sin, death, and the devil when he rose from the dead. When Jesus found his disciples the same day of his resurrection, he brought with him a set of duplicate keys for all his disciples. What was once a secret that few could understand was now good news for everyone waiting to hear.

The rock, the sure foundation, of the church is the forgiveness of sin. This is the word that the gates of hell cannot prevail against. Jesus, who is the Messiah, has unlocked the kingdom of heaven completely for you in your baptism. Jesus does not lock and unlock the doors to the kingdom of heaven to you based on what you do or fail to do. Jesus has done it all for you. Listen again, to the unlocking of the door to the kingdom of heaven. "Child of God, your sins are forgiven." Amen