

Devotion: August 19, 2020

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.*

“Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but by my Father in heaven.”

Peter, like most of us and the world generally, defines power in terms of strength and might. When Peter says “*messiah*,” he’s thinking of a warrior king. But, the story of the cross turns the world’s (and our!) ideas of power on their head and demonstrates the true power of sacrificial love.

This year, for a lot of us, has been a year of faith in crisis: How do we keep faith in the time of COVID? And struggle for racial equity? And weather economic crisis? And stay hopeful (or even just sane) amid such a toxic political culture? (And all this during an election year!)

All of those are genuine and appropriate questions. And the good news of the Gospel is that we don’t have to take final responsibility for answering them, nor do we have to work toward the faith, hope, and courage that we may feel are in short supply. Because the faith we are seeking, the courage we hope to find and to share – these are gifts from God. And... *God loves to give us the best gifts.*

Which means that after wondering how long it’s going to be till we can be gathered together in person, or after wondering how we will get through all this and keep faith – we need to remember that God, creator of the heavens and the earth, the One who brings death from life and creates from nothing... this God is still at work. God is still at work sustaining us in faith, creating in us hope, guiding us to acts of courageous generosity.

“Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you,” Jesus says to us as well as Peter, but rather “*by my Father in heaven.*”

God is still at work.

God is at work when I received the kind notes and e-mails, recently from all of you. God is at work in the kindness and responsibility to wear masks in public. God is at work in the donations to our church that keep us going. God is at work in the imperfect, often stumbling, but vital work for greater racial equity and justice. God is at work in the willingness to give up things, like in-person worship, that typically sustain us out a sense of love of our brothers and sisters in faith. God is at work even via recorded, live-streamed, or zoom worship services.

God is at work. God is with us, sustaining our faith, equipping us to meet the needs of our neighbor, renewing us in hope and courage, and preparing to work through us for the sake of the world God loves so much.

God is still at work.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we know that we are dear children of yours and that you are our beloved Father, not because we deserve it, nor ever could merit it, but because our dear Lord, your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, wills to be our brother, and of his own accord offers and makes this blessing known to us. Since we may consider ourselves his brothers and sisters and he regards us as such, you will permit us to become and remain your children for ever. Amen.

-Martin Luther (1483-1546)