

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost/August 27, 2017
Matt 16:13-20/Jesus is the Christ
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Deacon Jerry Stobaugh

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

According to the ancient Greeks, the classical elements of the universe were earth, air, fire, and water. This view point continued through the Dark Ages into the Age of the Enlightenment. Once scientists began measuring things and performing experiments to test our understanding of the world, earth, air, fire, and water were replaced by the chemical elements we have today; such as Hydrogen, Helium, Lithium, Beryllium, Boron, Carbon, and so forth.

Although well educated people never really believed the earth was flat, there was a time when they did believe the earth was the center of the universe and the Sun, planets, and stars all moved around the earth. Soon after people like Galileo began looking through telescopes and that idea was dropped. Now we believe the earth and the other planets of our solar system travel around the Sun. The Sun in turn travels around the center of the Milky Way Galaxy and the Galaxies themselves all travel around something. It seems there is no real center of the universe. Everything is just in motion around everything else. These are but two examples of the hundreds of scientific ideas that changed over the centuries. Things once accepted as scientific fact were proven wrong and other ideas took their place.

For centuries, much of what we call science came under the category of philosophy. People would debate one another and come up with their world view which usually dealt with how the universe worked. When scientists tested these views, they discovered the way we thought how the world worked was wrong. Science had to change

and it struggled long and hard to do so. The scientific community had to accept the idea speculation and debate are not reliable. You must have an external standard and this standard must tell you one way is right and the other ways are wrong.

Now you would think people would learn from the struggles science experienced and would stop relying on speculation and debate. You would think people would immediately start looking for some sort of external standard to help them know the truth; but that is not the case.

Consider the question Jesus asked in today's Gospel. "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" This is an important question for us and the world. Even today people have many different answers. Some say Jesus came to show us how to get in contact with the consciousness living inside each of us. Others don't get quite so cosmic and say Jesus is my best buddy. Some say Jesus came to give us an example of how to live. Others say Jesus came to give us the power to lead a god-pleasing life.

If you carefully examine each of these ideas, you eventually find human speculation at their core. Somewhere, somehow, every one of these ideas began with someone who thought this feels right; this seems to be the right idea. Some might even say their idea seems to make more sense than even what the Bible says. Others might comingle verses to make the bible seem to support their own idea.

The disciples report to Jesus wasn't all that much better. "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." At least these are Biblical people and acknowledge some respect for Jesus, but they are still based on speculation. The crowds who came to hear Jesus speak didn't really know who He was in this place and time.

When we deal in speculation about Jesus, we deal with sinful self-centered people. Speculation about Jesus always takes us away from our reliance on Jesus and toward reliance on self. The speculation feels or seems right always leaves a way for us to contribute at least a little bit toward our own salvation. Even something that sounds as harmless as “Jesus came to give us a second chance” is not right. No matter how many chances Jesus gave us to “get it right,” we always fail. Instead, Jesus came to “get it right” for us.

Now that we, and the disciples, have reviewed the popular speculation on the identity of Jesus, Jesus asks us the really important question. The better translation for this question would be, “And you; who do you say that I am?”

Thank God for Peter. He answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Was Peter speculating when he gave this response? Jesus answers this by saying, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” This is not speculation for it is from the most absolutely reliable external source available; namely, God the Father Almighty Himself.

This confession is so reliable it is the foundation of Christ’s church. Jesus continues and says, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” This rock of a confession tells us who Jesus is and what He did. Jesus called Himself the “Son of Man.” Peter’s confession called Him “the Son of the living God.” This means Jesus is both God and man in one person. He is God from eternity and man from His conception by the Holy Spirit.

When Peter confessed, “You are the Christ ...” he is saying Jesus is the anointed one, the Christ, the Messiah. The anointed offices of

Israel are prophet, priest, and king. In Jesus, we have the perfect fulfillment of all three. As King He not only established the law, but keeps it perfectly. As Prophet He not only speaks for God, but He also fulfills all the words spoke through the prophets. As Priest He not only offers up the sacrifice for sin, but He is the sacrifice.

It is at the cross we see what it means to be the Christ. There Jesus sacrificing Himself for the sins of the world. There is the Christ, the rock on which the church is built. With His suffering and death, Christ overcame sin. Since death relies on sin, Christ also defeated death. Resurrection must follow the victory Christ won for us on the cross. It is with His resurrection Jesus finished showing the disciples and us what it means to be the Christ. After the resurrection, St. Luke: [Luke 24:45-46] “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead...”

This complete picture of Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection shows us what it means to be the Christ. It is with this complete picture we begin to understand Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” We cannot make this confession on our own. It is not something developed through our own speculation. It must come from outside of us. The Father sends the Holy Spirit for this purpose. The Holy Spirit works through word and sacrament to establish and maintain our faith. It is only by faith can we truly make this confession.

Faithfull people in Christ have a relationship with God that will last forever. Jesus promised He dwells with you always while you live here and in this time. He promises you who believe will live with Him forever in heaven after your time here. These blessings are far better than anything our speculation can provide; because it comes from God the Father Almighty and you know it is the truth.