

Season after **PENTECOST**

Prayers

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, whom to know is everlasting life, grant us to know Your Son, Jesus, to be the way, the truth, and the life that we may boldly confess Him to be the Christ and steadfastly walk in the way that leads to life eternal; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 138 (antiphon v. 8a)
Isaiah 51:1-6
Romans 11:33-12:8
Matthew 16:13-20

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 645
Other Hymns – 839 (OT), 913 (OT), 783 (E), 828 (E), 587 (G), 909 (G)

Heavenly Father, You revealed Jesus of Nazareth to be the Christ and Your beloved Son. Bless the Church, that we always confess this, even in the midst of persecution and hostility. Do not let our faith grow faint, but renew our minds, that we be not conformed to this world. Help us to test what we see and hear, that we may discern Your will and rejoice in all that is good and acceptable and perfect. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, we ask that You would grant health and wisdom to those in authority, that they may carry out their duties according to Your will, protecting us from violence and evil and maintaining peace and righteousness. Let our land be filled with citizens who love You with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, and who love their neighbours as themselves. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of Abraham, he was only one when You called him, but You blessed and multiplied him. So bless and multiply us with children. Protect mothers with child, and equip fathers, that they may lead and raise their households in the fear and love of You. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Kind and gracious Master, remember all who cry out to You in their time of need [particularly all whom we especially remember: _____]. Grant each one Your peace, Your healing and Your comfort. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Season after **PENTECOST SERMON**

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
(Series A)

Sermon Text: Matthew 16:13-20

“Blessed Are You”

You have probably heard the saying that the only things that are certain in life are death and taxes. This is a ‘tongue-in-cheek’ type statement that reflects the truth that we live with a lot of uncertainty. There are a lot of unknowns.

The Gospel Reading for today points us to where we can find true certainty. In this life we can be certain that Christ Jesus is going to return to judge the living and the dead and usher in the new heavens and the new earth. We can be certain that we are and will be set free from sin, death, and all evil. We can be certain that Christ’s Church, founded on the rock of Peter’s and the other apostles’ confession of Christ will prevail. No matter what.

Jesus asks the disciples a question that gets to the very heart of the Christian faith. Everything hinges on it. *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”* He asks them. Who is Jesus? This is an important question . . . the most important question in all of life. And what is your answer?

Now, as you know, there are a lot of different answers to this question. In fact, when you type that question into ‘Google search’ you will get back over 1.5 billion results in less than one second. It’s overwhelming. Some answer that Jesus was a nice religious man, or a moral teacher, or an example of how to live a righteous life, or our ‘life-coach’ who helps us get through the ups and downs of life, or that He was a prophet among many prophets. Although these responses might have some truth in them, they do not, however, fully answer the question of who Jesus is.

There was a lot of confusion over who Jesus is back in His day, too. The disciples answer His question with these words: *“Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”*

"But what about you?" Jesus responds. *"Who do you say that I am?"* Peter replies, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* This is a breakthrough moment; for Peter's grasp of Jesus goes far beyond the popular understanding of Him as a prophet to confessing that He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, the fulfilment of the salvation promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob . . . and, yes, also to you.

"Blessed are you"; so Jesus responds to Peter's confession. Not 'blessed' in the sense that we sometimes understand it. Not blessed with wealth and abundance. Not blessed with health and a good, peaceful life. But rather, blessed with God's gifts. Blessed by being saved by God's grace. God's salvation, after all, consists of Jesus Himself. And one receives that salvation by being brought to faith, to the true knowledge of Jesus the Christ. How could one be more blessed than that?!

Now, Peter is not praised by Jesus for his great insight, or for answering the question correctly, or for anything else that he might have done. Rather, Jesus pronounces him blessed because God the Father has revealed His Son to him. In other words, *"blessed are you"* means 'saved are you' – blessed, saved because of what God has graciously revealed and given to you through faith.

This is what we are taught in Luther's Small Catechism. In his explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, Dr. Luther teaches, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel." Believing that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah, who has come to save the world from sin and death, is something that is granted to our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel. St. Paul puts it this way in his letter to the Ephesians, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*

So, why does all this matter? Why is it so important to believe and confess the true faith that Jesus is the Christ who has come to take away the sin of the world? It matters because Jesus, the Christ, the Anointed One, holds the keys to heaven. Remember what He said? *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* He makes it crystal clear that He is the only One who has the keys to heaven.

And He wants those keys to be used. So He then says to Peter, *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

Now, by nature we are born sinful . . . shackled, imprisoned by sin. And no matter how hard we try to pick the locks, we can't free ourselves. But God sent His Son, the Christ, the Messiah, to set us free; and He did so through His life, death, and resurrection. And now He has given to His church on earth, to use

the words from the catechism, “the special authority to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.”

Yes, for those who take sin lightly, who treat sin flippantly, who have no desire for God’s forgiveness, who are impenitent – their sins and the consequence of those sins remain upon them. Conversely, for those who do repent, who are sorry for their sins, who trust in Christ as their Saviour – their sins are loosed, forgiven, not counted against them. The Office of the Keys is what this is called in the catechism – the authority Jesus has given to His church to lock and unlock, to close and open heaven.

And this Office of the Keys is a most precious gift because it applies Jesus’ forgiveness to us personally. After all, we all struggle with sin in this life and will continue to do so . . . whether it’s gossip, anger, jealousy, lust, laziness, greed, pride, or what have you — and we can find ourselves filled with shame and despair. At times like these, how sweet are the words spoken by a called minister of Christ which absolve us of our sins in a way that is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord spoke them Himself . . . that this forgiveness restores peace with God and in our hearts and deepens our faith in His love for us.

“Who do you say that I am?” Who is Jesus? The answer to this question gets to the very heart and centre of the Christian faith. For He is the Messiah who took on our flesh in order to take upon Himself our sin. He is the Messiah who, after suffering and being put to death for our sins, rose victoriously. He is the Messiah who has destroyed sin, death, and the devil as shown by His death-defeating resurrection. He is the Messiah who fulfilled God’s plan of salvation to save you and to secure your eternal future. And with St. Peter, we thus joyfully confess about Jesus what God the Father has revealed to us and placed in our heart, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

“Who do you say that I am?” Who is Jesus? The hymn writer puts it well:

‘Christ is the world’s Redeemer, The lover of the pure,
The font of heav’nly wisdom, Our trust and hope secure,
The armor of His soldiers, The Lord of earth and sky,
Our health while we are living, Our life when we shall die.’ Amen.