

Wednesday, March 22, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 25

Matthew 16:13–20

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Reflection

Yesterday’s message was to grow up. Today’s is to see how far we’ve come. The disciples/apostles may have little faith at this point, but even the faith the size of a mustard seed will move mountains. Jesus takes his disciples aside and begins to ask them obliquely who people think he is. The answer is unanimous: a powerful prophet of some sort. They’re not wrong, but they haven’t seen all these disciples have seen or heard either.

So, he asks the crucial question, in distinction to what the people think, who do you say I am? Peter’s response is insightful: “You are the king of Israel, chosen by God to represent his people.” This insight reveals new growth, so Simon receives a new identity: the rock (Peter). Peter and his insight (along with those other disciples/apostles that Peter represents) will be the foundation of the Christ-community.

Stanley Hauerwas, in his commentary on Matthew, notes that Peter’s insight is not given through some transcendent means. Rather, Peter knows Jesus to be the Messiah because Peter has been Jesus’s Messiah. Those of us who are hungry to know God must see Jesus, and we can only see Jesus by being his disciple. Again, Hauerwas reminds us that Jesus is the revelation of God; Peter and Scripture are witnesses to that revelation. Peter’s confession, and Scripture itself, are important as they direct our attention to our Lord.

Once again, Scripture is absolutely critical for our knowledge of God/Jesus because we have no access to Jesus apart from its witness. All other attempts to know Jesus—the self revelation of God—apart from Scripture (and Peter’s witness) is a Jesus of our own making that will be an idol that we can wield to gain power over others. The only way to know Jesus and therefore God is to be Jesus’s disciple and follow him in obedience. It is this community of Christ that death cannot destroy.

Prayer

Lord, we confess that we have tried to know you apart from the witnesses you have given. We have constructed images of “God” apart from the revelation of Jesus. And, we have create caricatures of Jesus to gain power over others. Help us, once again, to return to Scripture and to follow Jesus as Lord. Help us too to discern who he is, so that we might know God and live. Amen.