

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.

Grace and peace are yours in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Good morning and welcome! As I mentioned before, my name is Andy Boesenecker, and I am the pastor and mission developer of Mustard Seed House Churches, located throughout Fort Collins, Loveland and Greeley Colorado. It is my pleasure to be with you this morning not only to dig into this text from Matthew, but also to extend a word of deep thanks.

As some of you might already know, King of Glory has been a supporter - a mission partner - of Mustard Seed since before Mustard Seed was even a church. Your prayers, your financial contributions, and your guidance has helped Mustard Seed blossom into a community that has grown significantly since our planting in December of 2013. For that, and for your continued support, we give you thanks.

I believe the question before us this morning is as relevant as it was when Jesus asked it of the disciples nearly 2,000 years ago:

Who do you say that I am? Who do people say that the Son of man is?

Peter, like every children's sermon participant after him, nails it. When in doubt, just say Jesus, right?

Peter gives the answer that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. He's been paying attention - or the writer of Matthew has been paying attention. Either way, it's a true statement, a faithful statement, a bold theological claim, and one that I believe the church has wrestled with ever since it was delivered.

It's an answer that, while theologically correct, actually leads to more and more questions. The bible's kind of like that, isn't it? Because, what does it mean if Jesus is indeed *the one*? What does it mean for us as followers of Jesus? What does it mean for the rest of the church, some of whom look nothing like us, live in different places, worship nothing like us and have experiences far different than our own? What does it mean for Peter, upon which the Christian church was supposedly built? What does it mean for the church today, the body of Christ that confesses the same?

There's two statements that I believe are helpful here as we wrestle with this together:

The first statement is simply this: **what we say about God, we say because we've experienced it in and through Jesus.** For example - if you're going to make the bold and audacious claim that God is love, that God is welcoming, that God is grace for all people, then as a Lutheran you're going to root those claims in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

At Mustard Seed, a church that describes itself as Christ-centered (meaning our life together revolves around the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we often use the following words to describe God, based on what we've experienced in Jesus:

Love.

Grace.

Unconditional.

Alive.

Hospitality.

Inclusive.

Justice.

Equity.

Peace.

Suffering.

With us.

Absent.

Everywhere.

I wonder - I wonder what words you'd use to describe God - what truths and experiences you've had as a follower of Jesus that would shape the words you'd use to tell someone else about Jesus. Not to convert them or convince them, but rather to describe what you've experienced.

What words describe God?

The second statement is this, and it borrows a few words from former Vice President Joe Biden: **don't tell me about your values, show me your budget and I'll show you what you value.**

This is where, I believe, things get real for the church. It's also the point at which we realize Joe Biden should be doing mission developer trainings for the Lutheran church - because he nails it. This is where our theology - all those things we say and confess about Jesus and God and the workings of the Holy Spirit - it's where they get real. It's where our theology hits the road, takes flesh, becomes something more than just ideas.

At Mustard Seed, we claim to be a "a collective of Christ-centered, queer-inclusive, sacramental, justice-focused, liturgical house churches..." Now that's a mouthful, and, to be honest, it means absolutely nothing if we don't live that out not only in our words but in our actions - in and through our life together - as a church.

We're queer-inclusive, and I'm proud to say that at Mustard Seed that has meant empowering and equipping LGBTQ leaders on our church council, as well as facilitating, writing and eventually passing a resolution at synod assembly making the Rocky Mountain Synod an open and affirming synod - meaning that anytime we gather as a synod, we do so fully welcoming and affirming LGBTQ people. We're a reconciling - not reconciled congregation - because the work of unconditional grace and love is not past-tense - it lies ahead of us, pulling us into the future.

We're sacramental - meaning that we don't just talk about the grace and love of God - we practice it with and for one another - sharing a community meal, breaking bread and sharing the cup at every house church worship service, making sure that if we run out of room we just work on building a bigger table, constantly asking "who's not here yet" and making sure that our table - God's table - is a place of radical grace, equity and hospitality - something rare in our world today.

We're justice-focused - meaning that we marched in solidarity with our Muslim, immigrant and refugee brothers and sisters, we speak out in support of our trans military members, we show up at rallies in the name of love and justice, we continue to be confronted and convicted while speaking out and learning about the continued and systemic reality of racism and racial violence in our country, we write letters to our legislators asking them to act with compassion and a preference for the poor, and we know that our commitment to engaging these places of instances of suffering in our world is where we find Jesus - suffering with us and pointing us to the way of life and peace in our world.

We're liturgical, too - even though a lot of folks at Mustard Seed wouldn't know what that really means - we follow an order of worship that is very much like what you do here - gathering together, hearing the word, sharing the meal, and being sent on our way - it's just at Mustard Seed we blur the lines between these things because that's been our experience with the church in general - Jesus messing up the distinctions and lines and boundaries we cling to while proclaiming life and love and grace in the middle of all the messiness of our lives.

And we do all of this - to bring it back to Joe Biden - we show the community what we value and we support all of this through a budget of less than \$90,000 per year which makes it clear what takes priority and what falls by the wayside based on who we say we are as a church rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Outreach, hospitality, putting people - even those who don't call Mustard Seed home - first, and sustainability are key values that we continue to lift up through our budget.

I believe you do the same here at King of Glory. Show me your budget and I'll show you what you value. Or, perhaps as an answer to Jesus' question: show me your budget, and I'll show you who you say Jesus is.

From what I know about you from my time here, I feel comfortable saying the following:

You confess Jesus as the one who feeds and houses the homeless.

You confess Jesus as the one who welcomes everyone - especially LGBTQ individuals and families.

You confess Jesus as the one who brings joy to us through music, fellowship and laughter.

You confess Jesus as the one who is found out in nature just as much as Jesus is found in the comfort of a sanctuary.

You confess Jesus as the one who is constantly pushing us to do a new thing - because Jesus is constantly doing a new thing.

You confess Jesus as the one who comes and gives us communion and holds our hand while we're sick, dying or unsure what tomorrow will bring.

You confess Jesus as the one who is present in the curiosity of a child.

As a church, as followers of Jesus, we've long been hung up on having the right answers - but I think the world we live in today pushes us not just to confess the truth as Peter does - but to live it. Publicly. When people are trying to figure out who you say Jesus actually is, they'll be less focused on what you say and most impacted by what you do, where you stand and who you stand with in this world that is deeply divided.

At one point, Martin Luther made the bold assertion - and I'm paraphrasing here - that God doesn't need your good works - but your neighbor does. It's a statement rooted in a deep experience of God's grace - that God loves us unconditionally and there's no good deed we could do to add to that or change that. I want to end with a twist on that, based on the text before us today, and the realities of what we've experienced in Jesus and how we show that to the world:

Jesus doesn't need your right answers - and he didn't need Peter's either. Jesus doesn't need your good works - he loves you unconditionally. But your neighbor - your neighbor does. And your neighbor, in Charlottesville, in Boston, in places across our country and our world - your neighbor is watching, listening, waiting - to hear a word of hope from the faithful in the name of Jesus. So go - go and tell them - or better yet, show them - show them with all you do as a church - who Jesus is to you. Amen.