

“Like a Rock?”

Matthew 16:13-20

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Kipp Wolfe

If you were to ask most people to name one or two of the most popular verses in the Bible, most people would probably mention John 3:16 and the 23rd Psalm. In a college class in England recently the professor asked the students what they recognized about some words and the students said they did recognize the words, they had heard some of them before, but they were not able to identify them as being a part of the 23rd Psalm.

There are other scriptures that we might have as favorites, but we might not know exactly where they are.

“I lift up my eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help.”

“Create in me a clean heart, O God.”

Those are both Psalms that are popular with many people, but we might not recognize them as being from the 121st or the 51st Psalm.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” That’s a favorite scripture of many people. We might not remember that it is from Philippians.

The 8th chapter of Romans is full of biblical and life truth. It climaxes at the end of the chapter “Who can separate us from the love of Christ?” We might not remember exactly where to find that scripture.

I would hope that as a part of the church if anyone asked you, “Where do we find the Confession,” the words that I read this morning, I would hope that you would be able to tell them they’re found at least one place, in the 16th Chapter of Matthew. This scripture is important to us, not just because of Peter’s confession, but because of our own confession and what it says to us about the church.

I know that you’ve heard this scripture before. “In the district of Caesarea Philippi . . .” When we hear those words, those words are often enough that we know what follows after that. That’s important. The location is a place where many kinds of gods, some real and some false, were worshipped. So it’s not an accident that Matthew includes the location in his scripture. It would be similar today to going to some seat of power, such as Washington, D.C., a place where many gods, some false and some real, are worshipped. We might even say that Tulsa, Oklahoma, would be such a place—a place where gods, both false and true, are worshipped.

You know what happens next. When preachers tell this story they do it in their best Charlton Heston impression. “Who do men say that I am?” I don’t

think Jesus probably said it that way. I think he was wondering about his mission and his calling. He took the disciples aside and said, “What are people saying about me? Who do they think I am?” The disciples responded, as Beverly told us, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, some Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Again, the preacher in his best voice: “But who do you say I am?”

I think Jesus really said, “But what do you guys think about me? Who do you think I am? You’ve been with me all of this time now. What do you say?” Simon Peter, with all the faith he can muster, said, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the one we’ve been waiting for all of these years. You are the Son of the Living God.”

Jesus said to Simon Peter, whom he has nicknamed “The Rock,” the meaning of the word “Peter,” “Blessed are you.” Simon Peter, the Rock? Is that really the best nickname for him? Remember when he tried to walk on the water and he sank? Jesus called him a man of little faith. In just a couple of verses after Peter makes his confession Jesus says, “I have to go to Jerusalem now where I will be killed.” Simon Peter takes him physically and says, “This can’t be so!” Do you remember what Jesus called Peter? He called Peter Satan, not Rocky, Satan. When the chips were down, when Simon Peter had the chance to say, “Yes, I know him. He’s my lord. He’s the son of God,” he denied that he even knew who Jesus was. Rocky? Maybe we should call him Rooster instead of Rocky. Maybe we should call him “Chicken Legs” because he ran away when the chips were down, didn’t he?

Have you ever known anyone who had a nickname? When I was in High School, a close friend of mine named Bart had a nickname. You can imagine without thinking too hard what that nickname was. Bart the _____. It wasn’t Hart or Tart. Think “beans” when you think about his nickname. Bart was not a bad guy at all. He didn’t deserve that nickname. His dad was the Ford dealer in town and they had a lot of money. Bart always drove a new car. Everyone was jealous of him. When Ford Mustangs came out, Bart was the first one in our high school to drive a Ford Mustang. It was a white Ford Mustang. One day after basketball practice we walked outside. I was with Bart. As we walked to his car we could tell that something was wrong. Someone had taken a bottle of strawberry soda and poured it all over that white Mustang. Bart cried when he saw it. He didn’t deserve that nickname. I wonder if Peter really deserved his nickname. Was he a Rock? Do we want to follow his example?

First lesson from the scripture is this. Even rocks fail. Did you see the news account a couple of weeks ago about a national park in Utah called “The Arches?” One of those arches fell. It was one of the most famous arches in the

park. It collapsed. I did some research about that and discovered that since 1970 over 40 of those arches have fallen. Even rocks fail. Even rocks fall.

We learn that later Simon Peter had another name. If you're in the Catholic church you know it especially. Simon Peter became "Saint Peter." My favorite definition of a saint is this. "A saint is someone who makes it easier to believe in God by his faith." By the solid-rock faith Peter had, he made it easier for others to believe in God.

With that in mind, I want to address you today as living saints of the church. What we have done with this capital campaign and what we will do will make it easier to believe in God. If you have been part of the campaign, you are a living saint. The dollar amount is important in one sense. We struggled in setting that goal. We didn't want to set it too low. We didn't want to set it too high. I shared with the staff the other day Eisenhower's words, "Aim for the stars, if you don't get there you'll land pretty high anyway." If we don't reach our goal we've already landed pretty high, haven't we?

What we have done will make it easier for others to believe in God. Tom Rorschach mentioned some of these people and I want to repeat some of them again. Jane and Jim McKinney, all of the We Would Be Building Committee, Tom, George and Joan Hauger, Jim Alspaugh, Jim and Becky Gray, Bernie and Jennie Bowers, Charles and Mary Ann Hargrove, the team leaders, and certainly Mary Byrne, who did yeoman's work, far beyond what she was expected to do.

I want to thank some other persons also. It is a privilege to me, and I told Jeremy he might give Carol a heads up about this because I was going to mention their names in the sermon and it might be a good idea if they stayed awake, it is a privilege for me to work with Carol, with Jeremy, and with Beverly. A big part of what we have accomplished is due to the work they have done. Mark, Paul, the choir; Fran and the Praise Team, we have a good staff. It is a good time to reach out in the community and serve.

We need your help. I need your help. I have shared with some of you before that there is no power in the pulpit until there is prayer in the pew. Let me tell you what I think that means. Power in the pulpit is not a preacher getting up and displaying his or her oratorical skills so that when people leave after church they say, "Boy, she was really something when she preached today." Power in the Pulpit means this: when people leave church they say, "Boy, our God is really something!"

Our God is really something because God is with us in what we are doing. Did you hear what Jesus said to Simon Peter? When Peter made his confession, Jesus said, "Peter, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father

who is in heaven.” Christ would say the same thing to each of you. No matter how you were influenced by parents, grandparents, or Sunday School teachers, that’s not what led you to confess Christ as Lord. Paul put it another way. “No one says Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit of God.”

We in the church can also take this truth from our scripture today, churches have good times and bad times. We in the church might begin to wonder, “Are we going to be able to survive?” We need to hear Christ’s words again. “Not even the gates of Hades, not the powers of death, shall prevail against the church.” We sang it in our hymn of Praise today.

“That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I’ll never, no never, no never forsake.”

Thanks be to God. Amen.