Pentecost 12-Proper 16-Matt.16:13-20

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Jesus is aware of the speculations that have been circulating regarding his identity, so he asks his disciples who the *crowds* think he is. Their responses are prophetic figures. Not only does Jesus engage in a prophetic-style mission, he also describes himself as a prophet.

Yet when Jesus asks his disciples opinion, Peter responds, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Peter is the first character in Matthew’s gospel to put these two titles together in reference to Jesus. Declaring Jesus to be the Messiah-that is Israel’s king is a dangerous thing. (Note: He had and is traveling in Gentile Country.) You notice at the end of the episode, Jesus orders his disciples not to let anyone know that he is the Messiah.

Jesus praises Peter for coming to *recognize his true identity*, noting that such discernment could have only come from God and not human beings. Contrast: Some human beings who have witnessed Jesus’ healings and exorcisms see the hand of Satan behind them and not the spirit of God. Peter’s recognition earns him a new name. Peter comes from the Greek word, Petos, meaning Rock-in Aramaic, Cephas-Peter’s confession of Jesus’ identity is the rock on which Jesus will construct his church. The new community of God’s kingdom people. The church exists for one reason, to bear witness to Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, in everything it does the church is to proclaim the *absolute* and exclusive lordship of Jesus because “all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him.” Yet proclaiming that Jesus is Lord of all, is not simply a matter of confessing certain beliefs about Jesus, it is about spreading the kingdom of Christ’s reign throughout the world. As Jesus saw it, the world was subject to Hades, the Power of Death, and it was his mission to destroy the Kingdom of Death which Jesus did through his life, death and especially, his resurrection!!! This is why Jesus says, “on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” **Often** this statement is read as though it was the Church that needed protection from Hades, but the Church is *not* a gated community. The people of God are a missionary people, who have been called to proclaim Christ’s reign throughout the world. *The picture Jesus paints is not of the Church under attack, but Hades*. The people of God of are not to adopt a defensive posture, but an offensive one. The offertory hymn today by George Duffield Jr., Stand up, Stand Up for Jesus speaks to this. The hymn is based on Ephesians 6:11-18.

1. Stand up, stand up for Jesus! ye soldiers of the cross;  
   Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss:  
   From vict’ry unto vict’ry, His army shall He lead,  
   Till every foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord indeed.
2. Stand up, stand up for Jesus! The trumpet call obey:  
   Forth to the mighty conflict, in this His glorious day;  
   Ye that are men now serve Him against unnumbered foes;  
   Let courage rise with danger, and strength to strength oppose.
3. Stand up, stand up for Jesus! Stand in His strength alone,  
   The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own;  
   Put on the gospel armor, and watching unto prayer,  
   Where calls the voice of duty, be never wanting there.
4. Stand up, stand up for Jesus! the strife will not be long;  
   This day the noise of battle, the next the victor’s song;  
   To him that overcometh a crown of life shall be;  
   He with the King of glory shall reign eternally.