

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
13th Sunday after Pentecost - August 27, 2023

Call to Worship

As we gather today, Jesus asks us, "Who do you say that I am?"

You are our Messiah, the Son of the living God!

As we gather today, the Holy Spirit asks us,

"Who do you say that I am?"

You are our Comforter, Advocate, and Sustainer!

As we gather today, God the Father asks us, "Who do you say that I am?"

You are our Creator, Provider, and Healer!

As we gather today, the Triune God asks us, "Who do you say that I am?"

You are Love that creates, saves, and enfolds us into the family of God!

May we be instruments of Love in all that we are and all that we do.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, March 2023.

[Discipleship Ministries | Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A ... \(umcdiscipleship.org\)](http://umcdiscipleship.org)

Hymn

Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord

260

Refrain

*Alleluia, alleluia,
give thanks to the risen Lord;
alleluia, alleluia,
give praise to his name.*

1. Jesus is Lord of all the earth;
he is the King of creation:

Refrain

2. Spread the good news o'er all the earth;
Jesus has died and has risen:

Refrain

3. We have been crucified with Christ;
now we shall live forever:

Refrain

4. Come, let us praise the living God,
joyfully sing to our Saviour:

Refrain

Words and Music: Donald Fishel

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Eternal God,
you are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow,
and yet you come to us afresh each new day.
You breathe new life into what has grown tired and discouraged.
You offer healing for what is worn or broken.
You restore hope when things seem impossible.
You are the source of life and love for all your creatures,
and you renew us to put our love for you
into action for the wellbeing of your creation.
And so we worship you, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit,
offering our prayers and praise to you,
eternal and ever-present God, now and always.

**Merciful God,
we confess that we have strayed from your purposes.
You set a path for us to follow, but we conform to the ways of this world.
You give each of us gifts to use for the work of your kingdom,
but we wait for others to do what needs doing.
Forgive us for taking the easy way out,
and renew in us the eagerness and energy to serve,
in the powerful life-giving name of Jesus we pray. Amen**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 13th Sunday after Pentecost. August 27, 2023. Year A.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Through the abundance of God's mercy and forgiving love, you are empowered to be disciples, to reach out to others, to offer the words and deeds of hope in a struggling world. God's blessings are poured over you for this service in Christ's name.

[Ministry Matters™ | Worship Connection: August 27, 2023](#)

Scripture Reading Matthew 16:13-20

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' ¹⁴ And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' ¹⁵ He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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.' ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

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Message Who do you say I am?

I still remember back to when my children were in school, specifically, when my oldest son, Michael, was in high school. Now kids tended to come in and out of our house pretty regularly. One friend of my son's was particularly unabashed. It happened one day that my parents were visiting with us. Ken and I, along with my mom and dad were having a conversation as we relaxed together in the living room. Michael's friend bounded into the house and up the stairs and without so much as a breath looked at my parents and said, "Who are you?!"

Of course we answered his question and he left the room as quickly as he had entered as he went to find Michael somewhere else in the house. My parents, Ken and I looked at each other and laughed. Somehow our young friend felt comfortable enough to question the presence of others in our home, my parents no less.

If you have never been asked the question of "Who are you?" maybe you have asked it or at least thought it about someone else. I have had moments where someone I know well has done something out of character, good or not so good, and thought to myself "Who are you?"

This scripture reading from Matthew asks a central question about identity. But before we get to that let's get ourselves situated. Jesus and the disciples are in the district of Caesarea Philippi. When you read that, one might think, well that's nice, so what? Well, this area was and is of significance to the conversation. This was a place where fertility cults and other gods were worshiped and celebrated. It was a Roman city and to speak of someone having power, other than a Roman Emperor, could prove fatal.

It is here that Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is? It is often easy to speak of what other people are saying, we call it gossip. So those answers come pretty easily to the disciples," Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (v14) Imagine the scuttlebutt that ensues as they share what others have heard around town and in the countryside.

However, Jesus doesn't leave it there. That was just the set up to the next question, "But who do you say that I am?" Well, if that doesn't stop you in your tracks. Barbara Brown Taylor in her book *The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew* shares the following that I think is another picture worth pondering as we think about this question. She writes,

It is too bad that the Bible has not come down to us like a musical score with all the pauses written in, or like the script of a play that tells us what happens while nothing is being said. It would be helpful to have stage directions, something Like: *[Center stage; As soon as Jesus asks the question the disciples all look away, some of them studying the backs of their hands while others move little piles of dirt around with the toes of their sandals.]* Who knows how long that silence lasts

before Peter breaks it with his answer? “You are the Christ the son of the living God.”¹

This is how Peter answered the question and he praised and blessed for his answer. Jesus said to him, “...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.” (v18,19)

Wow! Just wow! That is quite the promise even if it is difficult to unpack all that it means. In fact, most scholars seem to agree on one thing, no one has a handle on what all of this really means. This talk of loosing and binding is beyond what we have background enough for in order to come to a definitive answer. One a simple note it may be to say that the church has a role in helping people leads lives that transform. But all of that would take another sermon. This day we are focused on the question of identity.

So Simon Peter has answered the question. It has been asked and answered in an uncomfortable place, this place where other deities and rulers appear to have dominion and power. I am not sure that the question would ever be comfortable. What would you say if this morning you stepped outside the church and someone was staring up at the bell tower and asked “So what happens in this building?” You would likely be able to answer that with some very practical stuff, like a worship service, coffee hours, meetings. But what if they asked you, “Who do you worship?” or “Who is this Jesus person anyway?” Going from what to who is a pretty big shift.

How would you answer Jesus’ question of “Who do you say that I am?” It is worth the pondering. I remember one of the first times I was asked about my faith as a young mom. It was one of my close friends who was asking me. I know I didn’t have a very good answer at the time and thought to myself I need to work on that. Yet, here I am years later, with a Master’s of Divinity degree, preaching from this place, and I am still not sure that my answer would satisfy me or anyone else. It would certainly be a different answer than I gave years ago and that would be based in my learning but likely even more so based on my lived experience of God at work in my life, the church, and in the lives of others.

As I have written this message, I have also come to the place of...that’s okay. I don’t need to answer the question perfectly or with some wonderful theological explanation. Even Peter’s answer we are told did not come from himself but was revealed to him by God. (v17) But I think it is important to try to answer that question for ourselves and for others. The answer can change and evolve, it doesn’t need to be perfectly rehearsed. Sometimes you may even find that God gives you words you hadn’t expected. But our faith is more than hearsay or gossip about who Jesus is.

¹ Brown Taylor, Barbara. *The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew*. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2004. P71.

You have come here to this time of worship for a reason. Maybe it is habit, maybe it is out of curiosity, for many of us it is because we believe in Jesus and want to get to know more, to learn more so that we can live out the actions of our lives based in a life of hope, healing, love, and grace that is the desire of God for us. We may not be able to answer the question “Who do you say that I am?” with thoughtful and prepared sentences, but rather we more often find ourselves stumbling over words, knowing in our hearts that this life of faith is valuable and makes of difference and yet not knowing how to express that to others.

Be encouraged to try to answer anyway. Even if you are not asked directly about your faith, experiment with adding sprinkles about your faith into your conversations with others. Next week you will hear of how the rock, Peter, upon whose faith in Jesus stood as a place of firm footing becomes a stumbling block. Peter, a rock of the faith said stuff that he regretted after this shining moment. God still used him.

You are part of this gathering of Christians, this church. Your individual and our collective understanding of who we say Jesus is through our words and actions can speak to others searching for a place to belong, to learn, to love and find community. I often say that one can strive for excellence not perfection. And so in the church let us be encourage to proclaim as Peter did that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, in words and actions that speak to our minds and hearts while striving to reach for a deeper understanding and living that out in faith.

We ask it in the name of Jesus, trusting the deep love of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit working in and among us. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Life-giving God,
you equip your people with gifts to work for your kingdom,
bringing justice and peace to every land and community.
We thank you that you will work through us,
even when we don't feel equal to the task.
Help us recognize your Spirit at work among us.

Through your Spirit, O God, you give the gift of prophecy.
With this gift, empower the church to speak words of justice and truth
into situations where people are exploited or treated unfairly.
Guide us to bring change for good in the world, and bring hope to the hopeless.

In the example of your Son Jesus, O God, you give the gift of serving.
With this gift, encourage your servant Church to work with those made vulnerable
by structures of power and privilege. Show us how to share the abundance in our
country with lives and communities that often lack even basic resources.

With the inspiration of your Spirit, O God, you give the gift of teaching. As a church that values teaching, engage us to support access to education for every child. We pray for teachers and students as they prepare for another year of working together. Help us encourage each person who shares in a learning community this year.

Through the love and compassion of Christ, O God, you give the gift of encouragement. As a congregation, show us where and how to reach out to hearten any who are struggling. Give us the words and actions to comfort those who mourn, to be companions to those coping with mental or physical illness, and support any who feel isolated or left behind.

Through the examples of prophets and apostles, O God, you give the gift of leadership. Call up leaders within the Church to build up our ministries and model respectful ways of living and loving together. Call up leaders in our nation and neighbourhood who model respect and attend to the common good and the needs of the earth itself.

Gift-giving God,
we are grateful for all the people in whom we meet your gifts at work.
Inspire us to add our energy and experience to the care of creation
as the loyal followers of Jesus who embodied all your gifts
and taught us to pray together:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to the offering

A confession of faith may use the words

“I believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God”.

When we not only speak this, but we **believe** this statement, we want to align our life with the life of Jesus, who came to show people the Way of Life.

Week by week, we acknowledge one way of moving into alignment is to share gifts with the One who has first given to us. Our offering from our financial resources is one way to share those gifts.

We offer our gifts to God, with thankful hearts.

Adapted from [August 27, 2023 - Center for Faith and Giving](#)

If you consider St. Andrew's your church, regardless of where you live, would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a

donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Hymn

At the name of Jesus

340

1. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of glory now;
'tis our God's good pleasure we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.
2. Humbled for a season to receive a name
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came.
Faithful, Jesus bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious when from death he passed.
3. Name him, Christians, name him,
with love strong as death, name with awe and wonder,
and with bated breath; this is God the Saviour;
this is Christ the Lord, ever to be worshipped, trusted and adored.
4. In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true.
Crown him as your captain in temptation's hour;
let his will enfold you in its light and power.
5. Christians, this Lord Jesus shall return again,
with his Father's glory and an angel train,
for all wreaths of empire meet up on his brow,
and our hearts confess him King of glory now.

Words and Music: public domain

Benediction

Jesus asks each of us: Who do you say that I am?
Answer his question, this day and all your days,
in every word you speak, with every action you perform.

Matt. 16:15

May God who restores,
Christ who calls,
and the Spirit who empowers
bless you and increase your joy and gladness,
now and always.

Isa. 51:3

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year A, Volume 2 © 2014 Westminster John Knox Press