



## The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

### Sermon: Year A – Proper 16 – August 27, 2017

When I was chaplain at Seabury Hall, I took a Hawaiian Studies class from Keali'i Reichel, a class that he offered to the faculty and staff. And in those classes, he would often share Hawaiian proverbs and I remember one of them very well:

*I ka olelo o ke ola, I ka olelo o ka make*, in the word there is death and in the word there is life, indicating that the chief could forgive or condemn those who disobeyed him—with just one word. In the word there is death and in the word there is life.

There is definitely life in the word of Peter in today's Gospel, Peter's word in the district of Caesarea Philippi. There is also life in the words of Jesus who said, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."

I always understood the word rock to mean Peter, the person of Peter, to be the rock on which Christ builds his church. But during a class that I took not long ago, the professor posited to us students that we might want to think instead that it was the words of Peter, the quote/unquote Confession, and not the person that were the rock on which Jesus would build his church.

And so that means that when you and I say that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, you and I continue to be the rock on which Jesus build his church. And in our word there is life – not only life back then, but life in the here and now as we strive to move forward in mission and ministry—a ministry that focuses on giving glory to God and to God's son.

Peter spoke to Jesus on the banks of Caesarea Philippi. I've been to Caesarea Philippi. It's a beautiful place at the Springs of Hermon and the headwaters of the River Jordan. It's calm and peaceful. Trout swim in the streams and green water plants lightly waft in the water and its currents and the afternoon sun makes the ripples on the surface shine like diamonds.

I stood on the bluffs above the headwaters of the Jordan River and pondered this passage, Peter's Confession. At that time, I wondered why Jesus asked the disciples this question. And I remember thinking that he was growing into his ministry and was getting feedback from his friends that gave him the confirmation that he had to set his face toward Jerusalem. But thinking back on it, I think the Jesus foreknew all of that. He was, after all, God incarnate. The question was for Peter's sake, and for those who were listening and in Peter's answer there was life.

What if you and I, if all of us, are called to Peter this morning? What if we are all called by Jesus, through our confession that He is the Messiah, what if you and I are all called to be rocks upon which Jesus builds his church? And, yes, I think that Jesus asked this question not for his sake, but for Peter sake, and for our sake as well.

What does it mean for you and me to be Peter? Well, Jesus could trust Peter to be honest. Peter would say what was on his mind and in his heart, even if it made other people angry or frustrated them. So how do you and I answer honestly when Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?"

## **Pentecost 12 – Proper 16 – August 27, 2017, cont'd**

What does it mean for you and me to be Peter? Well, Jesus could trust Peter to be honest. Peter would say what was on his mind and in his heart, even if it made other people angry or frustrated them. So how do you and I answer honestly when Jesus asks, “Who do you say that I am?”

It's a really good question to ask in this day and age. in the midst of all the trials and tribulations we face these days (the threat of nuclear war from North Korea, clashes in Charlottesville with neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and the KKK; the issues of homelessness we face daily in the streets of our own city) how do we stay focused on God? How do we proclaim through our thoughts words and deeds that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God?

I don't know what the answer to that question should be for you, and I can only say what the answer to that question is for me. And for me, right now, in addition to the community and the sacraments, the answer is prayer, fervent and energetic prayer where I sit in the presence of God and ask God to show me what I can do to give God glory in my daily life and then to do what I can to share that with those around me.

The call to prayer. For some of us, that will mean sitting in stillness to feel God's presence. For others it will mean listening for that still, small voice. For others it will mean in prayer and action through advocacy and social justice. For others it will mean reciting well-known prayers like the Lords' Prayer or Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer.

Whatever it is for you, this morning as your priest, I ask that we commit a part of our day and a part of our lives to prayer, paying attention to God as part of our lives, and discerning God's will for us, carrying that out, and giving God glory through it all. That's how we will be the rocks upon which Jesus will build his church and will continue to build his church. And through it all may we join Peter on the banks of Caesarea Philippi this morning, may we join Peter and proclaim in our hearts to Jesus whom we worship this morning, may we proclaim that indeed, “You are the Messiah. You are the son of God.”

*Amen.*