

**Texts: Isaiah 51:1-6; Psalm 138; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20**

**[I am indebted to the commentary by Rev. Jin S. Kim found in *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol.3* for much of this sermon.]**

**Do you remember when you learned to drive? I bet that most of us who drive remember the day when we were handed the keys to the car. And those of you who are parents with kids who drive remember how nervous you were to place those keys in your teenagers' hand. Does a 16-year old really have the maturity to handle such responsibility?**

**We could ask the same question of Peter this morning. Jesus hands him the keys to the kingdom of heaven, but his track record as a disciple leaves something to be desired. Peter is the disciple who blurts out whatever comes into his mind without really thinking first. A couple of weeks ago, Peter and the other disciples were in a boat in the middle of a storm when Jesus came walking to them on the water. "Call me to come to you," Peter called out to Jesus, and when Jesus did, Peter stepped out on the surface of the sea. But then he looked around at everything but Jesus, and began to sink. In another story, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up to the top of a mountain, where he reveals himself in all his divine glory, along with Moses and Elijah. Peter is so overcome with fear that all he can do is stammer out something about building three tents. Finally, in a moment of crisis, Peter will deny that he ever knew Jesus. Not once, not twice, but three times.**

**Is that really the guy that Jesus calls the rock? How does he give the keys to the kingdom and build the church on someone like Peter? Clearly, Peter's authority is not based on his righteousness or on his achievements. So what is this all about?**

**Back at the beginning of this morning's gospel passage, Jesus asks his disciples "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And their answers seem to reflect whatever**

**faction they were part of – “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” We Protestant Christians might answer in a similar way, depending on our own denominational factions: Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Aimee Semple McPherson, or Billy Graham. Our interpretations of who Jesus is are filtered through our own time and place, and our own allegiance to a particular denomination.**

**But in the very next breath, Jesus asks, “But who do *you* say that I am?” And Peter, as he often does, blurts out his answer: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” This time he gets it, and Jesus replies with a blessing and a promise – “on this rock I will build my church.”**

**By the sound of it, Peter got a serious promotion to #1 Disciple. But notice: Jesus does not respond to Peter’s strengths or accomplishments. Jesus responds to Peter’s testimony: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And then he tells Peter that his testimony does not come from a human source. It’s not based on rumor or hearsay or gossip. Peter’s testimony comes from God.**

**And that is important to remember: How we identify Jesus, how we name him, how we talk about him is God’s work in each one of us. Your personal encounter with Jesus, the connection that you have with him, has been forged by the power of the Holy Spirit working in you.**

**“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” A living God is dynamic and not static. A living God is active in your life and in the lives of every single human being. A living God never stops speaking and acting, never stops creating, never stops loving, never stops desiring abundance and blessing and deep peace for each one of God’s creatures. A**

**living God lives in you, enlivens you, inspires you, uses your voice and your intellect and your abilities.**

**“Who do you say that I am?” This is the central question of the gospel. Who do you say that Jesus is? We Lutherans are pretty terrible at giving public testimony. Somehow we equate it with holy rollers, speaking in tongues, and altar calls. But none of that has anything to do with giving testimony.**

**Testimony is what you say to the person who asks you why you are a Christian. Testimony is what you tell your kids when they ask why your family goes to church. Testimony is what your kids tell their friends when they invite them to come to Wednesday School. Testimony is the conversation about gratitude that you have with your family over Thanksgiving dinner. Testimony is when you can no longer be silent in the face of injustice.**

**I’m going to give you the opportunity to practice this morning. Turn to someone sitting near you and take turns answering this question: What happened this past week that made you realize that God is at work? ...**

**For centuries, the church has tried to prove the existence of God through logic, or metaphysics or theology, or even science. For the most part, these have been losing propositions. The rock on which the church is built is not intellectual debate. The rock on which the church is built is not Peter, or Elijah or John the Baptist or Martin Luther. The rock on which the church is built is Peter’s testimony: You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Testimony is what changes lives. Testimony is one person telling another where they see the living God at work. Testimony, as Luther put it, it is one beggar telling another where to find bread. Down through the centuries, Christians have told the story of**

**Jesus. And they have told the story of who Jesus is for them, what Jesus is doing in their lives. Who do *you* say that I am?**

**This is not about the creeds, even though we Lutherans claim that creeds as statements of our faith. This is not about any doctrine, the Trinity or the virgin birth or the end times. This is about how you live now that God lives in you. This is about blessing backpacks because we know that the living God is there at school. This is about delivering groceries from the Shepherd's Pantry, because we know that whenever we feed a hungry person, we feed Jesus himself. This is about sewing quilts and purchasing pigs and goats to send overseas through Good Gifts, because we know that the living God works through our own hands.**

**And once you have spoken your testimony, once you have answered Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" -- once you have named and described how the living God lives in you, you can never be silent again. We are the church built on the rock of Peter's testimony. We must speak for those who cannot speak. We must name and call out the sins of racism and greed and violence. We must communicate with our elected leaders and hold them accountable for their own words and actions.**

**Jesus gave his life for the salvation of the world. Your words and your actions are your testimony. Let your life speak of your love for God, your love for each other, your love even for your enemies. Built on the rock of Peter's testimony, let your testimony -- what you say and what you do -- bear witness to the living God.**