

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

IDENTITY CRISIS

Matthew 16:13-20

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Analysis by Kris Wright

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?” 14And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 17And 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. 18And 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. 19I 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.” 20Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

DIAGNOSIS: IDENTITY CONFUSION

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Just Guessing*

“What’s the buzz?” Jesus asks the disciples. Who do “people” say I am? Well, judging from eye (and ear) witness accounts the consensus seems to be John, Elijah or Jeremiah, some kind of

prophet reincarnated. That seems to be a logical conclusion from the perspective of the folk wisdom of the time, but the truth is they don't know really know who the Son of Man is. They're just guessing.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Inadequate ID

The truth is "people" will never know Jesus' secret identity by human wisdom. That cannot be known by "flesh and blood." A prophet, yes, but surely that is inadequate when storming the gates of Hades and the powers of sin and death that bind "people." Without divine revelation which gives faith as gift (not just any faith, but faith in the crucified and risen Lord) there is no knowing Jesus as Christ and Son of God (see Luther's Small Catechism, explanation to the third article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ"). Without Jesus, Son of God, to say who they are, "people" are also left with an inadequate identity-one that doesn't relate them to God's redemptive work.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Locked Out

Without Jesus to give them their identity as his brothers and sisters, an identity that makes them heirs to the kingdom and "CHRISTens" them, they are left out, keyless, clueless, locked out. They will be the ones to ask God, "Who do you say I am?" To those who do not know his Son, God will reply, "I never knew you."

PROGNOSIS: IDENTITY CONFESSED

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Blessed Are You

What "people" cannot understand or believe by their own power is revealed by God himself in Jesus on the cross. This is not some-flash-in-the-pan celebrity about whom "people" speculate; this is none other than the Son of Man, who shows his undying love for humankind by giving up his life and breath. Simon Peter, who

only one chapter ago was declared to have “little faith,” is now able to confess (on behalf of all disciples) Jesus as Christ and Son of the living God. As Eugene Peterson translates this passage in *The Message*, “My Father in heaven, God himself let you in on this secret of who I really am.” And immediately, almost without taking a breath, Jesus goes on to reveal just what the Christ must do to redeem and reconcile the world to God.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – God-Given Identity

This cruciform identity is not easy for “people” to comprehend. Thank God, that God provides the faith they need to open their eyes (see again Luther’s *Small Catechism*, explanation to the third article of the Apostles’ Creed: “But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts” etc.). Such spiritual revelations change not just how people see Jesus, but how they see themselves: Thus God says, “And now I’m going to tell you who you really are” (*The Message*). The blessing of faith is that it reveals not only who Jesus is, but who Peter is as well. He receives a new identity – Petros – a chip off the old block, and on the cornerstone of that relationship Jesus builds his new community, the congregation of the new covenant, his church, the fellowship of those with new identities received by faith.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Having Keys Made

With this new identity as the Church of Jesus Christ comes the keys to his kingdom and the power and authority of the owner himself to carry out his mission: the power to overcome the “gates of Hades,” the power of death, and the authority to “bind or loose,” to make heavenly things effective on earth, to forgive sin, to free “people” from bondage, to unlock the door, to show them the way to the Father.