

A moment to decide
Matthew 16:21-28

Grace and Peace to You from God our Father and from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. Amen.

So who do you say Jesus is? Anyone? Boy, what a difference a week makes. For that matter what a difference a moment makes. There at Caesarea Philippi, in amongst the statues to the Syrian gods, the Greek gods, and the Roman gods, Jesus asks that simple question, who do you think I am? That is a question we should all be ready to answer, just as Peter did so boldly last week. I asked you all to think about that question last week, who is that you say Jesus is, to know who it is you believe in, be ready to answer what it means to say you're a follower of Jesus. Now a week later, I ask that question and still we fumble with the answer (or we get the answer). Do you remember Peter's bold answer?

Peter boldly answered it, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." You are the one who is the anointed one, the chosen one, the Lord on earth, God incarnate, come to give us salvation and win for us a freedom from sin. You are the chosen one who does the redeeming for all the world, giving us a place in your eternal kingdom now and forever. Right on! Jesus commends him for his answer and announces that on this statement is the building block of the church, the cornerstone, the foundation, the rock of faith. Peter at this moment has got it right! It is a true epiphany moment, the front of the class answer, high point in anyone's career. YES!

But we know that the moment passes. What a difference a moment can make. Peter only got the words right because the Holy Spirit guided him in speaking what was to be said. I don't believe after walking with Jesus for a couple of Years, seeing all those miracles and hearing all those teachings that Peter or the other disciples really had a true comprehension of who Jesus is or what he is about to do. Don't get me wrong they knew who they wanted Jesus to be, but they didn't understand who he truly was. That didn't come until much later, until after the resurrection, when the Spirit was given to them and their eyes were opened and they saw the true meaning of what Jesus had done. No up to this point they knew what they wanted Jesus to be and that was what was truly in their hearts. They wanted a new ruler, a king like King David of Israel's glory days. They wanted freedom from Roman oppression. They didn't want to pay Roman taxes. They didn't want the authorities of the day dictating to them what they should do, how they should live, and where they should worship. They knew exactly what they wanted. But that wasn't what Jesus had come to do.

Peter's high mountain top moment, suddenly comes crashing down. Now Jesus turns from that declaration of him as Messiah moment to describe to them what the Messiah is going to do. This is the turning moment in Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus turns from preaching and teaching about the Kingdom of God coming near to bringing about the Kingdom of God. He turns his attention to Jerusalem, this is Jesus turning towards the cross, towards his betrayal, his suffering and death.

Now that confession of Jesus' purpose doesn't shock any of you. We hear those words with totally different ears. We know Jesus is the Messiah, the chosen one, the one who comes to die for us. We see in the cross hope, promise, resurrection, victory over death. But when He tells this to his disciples, who just a moment ago had that mountain top experience, Jesus you are the chosen one – now suddenly he is going to suffer and die, they are shocked and don't like to hear that. We have the comfort of knowing what is going to happen and how everything is going to work out, but the disciples didn't at this point in the story. I am sure they didn't even hear the part about on the third day he will be raised. They heard that first part of suffering and killed and went into shock. The Messiah, Our Messiah, Our Jesus, Our leader suffering and dying. No way! Can't happen. Don't want it to happen.

The text tells us that Peter was especially worried, so much so that he drew Jesus aside to rebuke him about such talk. That sounds harsh doesn't it. If you rebuke someone you are scolding them, reprimanding them, racking them over the coals. That is what my English hearing ear things when I hear rebuke, but really I believe it would be more a word of caution, to grab hold of and restrain to protect would be the better wording. God forbid it, Lord this can not happen to you." It wasn't out of anger that Peter is rebuking Jesus, it is simply out of love, he doesn't want Jesus to head down this road. Peter isn't happy with what he has heard and he's letting Jesus know in no uncertain terms that "nobody but nobody is gonna mess with his Messiah!"

But Jesus exhausted with their misunderstanding of his intentions, says to Peter, Get behind me Satan. Again Jesus is not saying these words in anger, calling Peter the Son of the Devil or Satan himself. It is the doubt, the misunderstanding, the belief that we can hold back Jesus' actions or control God's will. In that disappointment Jesus turns to him and tells him quite frankly that belief is a stumbling block to following him. The one who had just been called the rock, the confession of faith, suddenly now is called a stumbling rock. What a difference a moment can make.

Many times Life comes down to those important moments. When the path can cut this way or go that way. The decisions we make at that moment can altar our entire lives. Peter in

one moment was on top of the world, and in the next crushed under guilt. It won't be the only time for Peter to experience this high and low. Remember just a few weeks ago we talked about Peter being on that boat during the storm with the other disciples. And he believes that it is Jesus coming to them across the sea, and he asks to come out with Jesus. And he does and begins to walk, - High- then he doubts and fears and he sinks – Low. Of course Peter is also the one who on that dark Thursday, after Judas leaves to go betray Jesus, declares boldly that he would follow Jesus anywhere and lay down his life for him – High. And we know that within a few hours Peter we ardently say three times within sight of Jesus, that He is not with him, that he does not know him. – Definite Low point. What the difference a moment truly can make.

But then after the resurrection, after the coming of the Holy Spirit upon all the disciples and their eyes and minds are open and they understand what the Messiah really did and what it means for all creation then and throughout time. Then at that time, this same Peter, suddenly switches those moments, experiencing lows to High. He is in hiding for his life, they are locked away in the house hiding from the Lord's enemies- low. When suddenly the Spirit comes rushing down and the disciples go forth speaking in many languages and Peter stands amongst them preaching boldly in the streets of Jerusalem calling them to repent and be baptized and that day 3,000 people are baptized- Definite high. Peter is the very one who tries to preach on the temple mount about Jesus and is arrested thrown into prison- Low. But an Angel of the Lord leads him out, freeing him in the night and sends him back to preach at the temple, where he preaches to the people day after day and more and more people come to believe – Definite High.

Yes it is true a moment can make a big difference. Peter experiences this moment that can change from high to low from low to high. We experience these same moments each and every day. Jesus goes on to tell the disciples that those moments are coming for each of us. That we have to make the decision to follow, to bear the cross, and know that it may not be the easy answer. The way we want, but it may be the way God wants. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for Christ's sake will find it.

Christ comes to us and asks us again and again who it is that we say that he is? Who is it that we believe in, how do we live as Christians, as people of God's way. Everyday we make decisions, choices, to live as God's people or to live as people of this world, centered on human things. Each and every moment matters in how we live out our faith. The way is clear, to pick up the cross and follow, to die with Christ and be resurrected with Christ in a new life, or to be centered on our wants, our demands, our opinions, our choices. Are we

standing on the rock of Christ and answering yes Lord, I will go where you send me, do what you want, be your witness here, at work, at the store, in the family. Or do we turn away and become the stumbling block who stands in the way of God's will, centered on our own wants and desires. Which rock are you? The moment to decide is now. Because everything can change in just a one moment. May you turn and follow Christ always. Amen.

May the Peace and grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.