

Sunday, August 23, 2026

Proper 16 A

13th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 16:13-20

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Intro: Identity Crisis

My friends,

“Whoooo aaaaaare yooooou?”

asks a blue caterpillar.

Young Alice responds:

“I hardly know, sir.

Just at present –

at least I know

who I was

when I got up this morning,

but I must have changed several times since then.”

Who are you?

This question has become more pressing
in recent years.

As culture has drifted farther and farther
from Christ

and His church,
people have lost themselves.

The world is changing
at an unprecedented pace.

Hyper-individualism,
algorithms,
and extremely personalized entertainment
have shredded community.

People are unmoored.

Disconnected.

Adrift.

They’re searching for identity.

So, where does identity come from?

Do politics create identity?

Gender?

Sexual attraction?

Genetics?

Upbringing?

Religion?

Nationality?

Skin colour?

Hobbies?

Likes and dislikes?

Fandoms?

Experiences?

Who are you?

Who are you?

And who actually gets
to identify you?

If we base our identity

on fallible

& unstable things,

we will never know.

Everything keeps shifting.

What we find

in ourselves changes,

and even lies.

So also

what we find around us

in the world.

If we look to the world or ourselves,

we will be lost like Alice.

“Since I got up this morning,

I must have changed several times

since then.”

We will see
 in today's Gospel Reading
 that identity is a gift
 from God.
 God gives us identity
 in Christ Jesus.
 Jesus forms us as God's people—
 His Church.
 Jesus never changes.
 Jesus is never wrong.

I. Identifying Jesus: Who Do You Say that I Am?

My friends,
 If we want to know who we are,
 we need to start
 with Jesus.
 Jesus is the One
 who gives us our identity.
 All hope begins with Him.
 So Jesus asks His disciples:
*"Who do people say
 that the Son of Man is?"* (Matthew 16:13)

The disciples give a variety of answers.
 Jesus has stirred the pot.
 He has performed miracles,
 preached to thousands,
 & rattled the religious leaders.
 Everyone is talking
 about Him.
 Everyone is trying
 to figure out
 who He is.
 Some say
 He's John the Baptist,
 others Elijah,
 Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

All those answers are wrong.
They are far less
than who Jesus is.

And people today still give a variety of answers.
Everyone must answer:
“Who is Jesus?”
Yet there is great confusion.
People try to label Jesus
in ways that suit them.
At best,
it is sincere misunderstanding.
At worst,
it is an attempt
to use Jesus
for our own purposes.

Some make Him
an all-inclusive cheerleader,
approving whatever we do.
Others call Him merely one option
among many.
They label Him
as just a good teacher.
Or a cosmic therapist,
life coach,
or prosperity-giver.
They see Him as mere political mascot,
social activist,
or moral example.
They say He’s a mystical friend,
limited to our hearts,
acting in impressions,
signs,
and wonders.
Or merely a spiritual Teddy bear—
offering comfort
without suffering
or a cross.

But Jesus will not be reduced
 to whatever we want Him
 to be.
 He is who He actually is:
 the great “I AM.”

So,
 who do you say
 Jesus is?

The Church is not making guesses
 about Jesus.
 Jesus asks His disciples:
“But who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter speaks for the Twelve.
*“You are the Christ,
 the Son of the living God.”*
 Peter gives the Church’s faithful answer.
 Jesus is the Christ.
 He is the Messiah.
 He is the One God sent
 to rescue the world.
 He is the Son
 of the living God.

But Simon does not **give** Jesus His identity.
 He confesses
 what God has revealed.
 Jesus says:

*“Blessed are you,
 Simon Bar-Jonah!
 For flesh
 and blood
 has not revealed this to you,
 but My Father
 who is in heaven.”*
 Peter speaks back
 what God has said.

This is what we do
when we confess the faith.
This is what we do
when we say the Creed.
We speak together.
We confess the same truth.
We say back to God
and before the world
what God has revealed
about Himself.
Confession isn't our invention;
it is our reception
and repetition
of God's revelation.

At Christ's baptism,
the Father declared
that Jesus is His beloved Son.
Simon simply confesses
what God has already said.
So our confession must always come
from God's Word.
We do not invent our faith.
We do not build it
on human ideas.
We speak
what God has given us to say.

God has revealed Christ
in the Holy Scriptures.
He gave those Scriptures
through the prophets
and apostles.
Through them,
God makes Christ known
to us.

Our knowledge
 of God
 does not originate
 with man.
 It comes
 from heaven.
 It comes
 from God
 through His Word.
 And this revelation is God's gift
 to you.
 You have heard His Word.
 You have received His confession.
 And by His grace,
 you confess with Simon:
*"You are the Christ,
 the Son of the living God."*

II. Identifying You: Who Does Jesus Say You Are?

My friends,
 Confessing this changes us.
 For God's Word does not return
 to Him empty. (Isaiah 55:11)

Jesus says to Simon,
*"And I tell you,
 you are Peter,
 and on this rock
 I will build my church,
 and the gates of hell
 shall not prevail
 against it."*

*I will give you
the keys of the kingdom of heaven,
and whatever you bind
on earth
shall be bound
in heaven,
and whatever you loose
on earth
shall be loosed
in heaven.”* (Matthew 16:18–19)

Before Jesus gave him
this name,
Peter was Simon.
Jesus gives Simon a new name:
Peter—“rock.”
Simon has been gifted a new identity
in Christ.

You, too,
have a new identity
in Christ.
You have been named
God’s beloved child
in Baptism.
In those waters,
Jesus placed God’s Triune name
upon you.
He made you His disciple.
He claimed you
as His own.
“God’s own child,
I gladly say it:
I am baptized
into Christ!”

You are God's redeemed child.
You could not pay the price
of your sins.
Jesus paid it in full.
You are forgiven.
You are washed clean.
You are God's saint.

Once,
you were defined
by sin and failure.
*"But you were washed,
you were sanctified,
you were justified
in the name
of the Lord Jesus Christ
and by the Spirit
of our God."* (1 Corinthians 6:11)
*"Therefore,
if anyone is in Christ,
he is a new creation;
old things have passed away;
behold,
all things have become new."* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

You were a slave
to sin and Satan.
But now Satan's accusations cannot stand.
In Christ,
his power over you is broken.
Against his tyranny,
God,
your Lord,
unites you to Christ.
United to Christ,
you are His Church.

III. Why Is Your Identity Secure?

By Christ's Word of promise,
your identity is solidly secure.
Jesus says to Simon-Peter:
*"And I tell you,
you are Peter,
and on this rock
I will build my church."* (Matthew 16:18)
In your confession of Christ,
you are members
of Christ's Church.
Scripture says:
*"So then
you are no longer strangers
and aliens,
but you are fellow citizens
with the saints
and members
of the household of God,
built
on the foundation
of the apostles
and prophets,
Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone,
in whom the whole structure,
being joined together,
grows
into a holy temple
in the Lord."* (Ephesians 2:19–21)

God sends forth His apostles
and prophets
to preach,
teach,
and confess Christ
to build His Church.

You rest on the apostolic faith—
once and for all delivered
to the saints.
Your identity
in Christ rests
on God's unchanging Word.

On God's victorious Word,
you are secure.
Jesus promises
*I will build my church
and the gates of hell
shall not prevail against it."*

The Church,
like her Lord Jesus,
will be assaulted
and attacked
in this world.
Persecution,
temptation,
accusation,
doubts,
and struggles
will all flow
from the gates of Hell
to undermine the preaching
of Christ's salvation.
But they will not prevail.
For Christ has identified you
as His own
and nothing
in all creation can separate you
from His love (Romans 8:38-39).
When Christ names you,
He vows
to protect you
with His promises.

And Christ promises,
 *"I will give you
 the keys
 of the kingdom of heaven,
 and whatever you bind on earth
 shall be bound in heaven,
 and whatever you loose on earth
 shall be loosed in heaven."*
The Church defeats the gates
of hell
and opens heaven
in Jesus' name.
Preaching the Apostolic Gospel
opens the welcome
of heaven
to all who believe.
And it binds those who reject
the confession
of Christ's name.
Through preaching,
baptism,
confession,
absolution,
and faithful teaching,
the Church continues the work
given to the apostles.
That work is the releasing
of Christ's gifts
to the world
and the rejection
of false teaching.
Through the Church,
Christ gives His gifts
and guards His people
from error.

Conclusion

My friends,
Who are you?

You know who you are.
As those who have been baptized,
you have received your identity.
You are God's baptized,
redeemed,
and beloved children.
You are Christ's forgiven,
blood-bought Church.
And that will remain the same,
morning,
noon
and night.

You have been given the Word
of the apostles
and prophets.
You have been promised
God's protection
from the evil one.
You have the kingdom
of heaven open
to you.

This identity
and these promises
are certain.
Rock solid.
Your identity is rock solid
because it has been given
to you
by Jesus.
And Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of the living God.

He is the Rock
on which
His Church is built.
And He came
to save us.
There is no firmer foundation
than Christ Jesus our Lord.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, amen.