



TOUCH POINT

## Come Again to Whose Church? – Touchpoint for August 23, 2023

### Matthew 16:13-20 (NRSVUE) Peter's Declaration about Jesus

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> And 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. <sup>18</sup> And 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. <sup>19</sup> I 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.” <sup>20</sup> Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

**Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.**

*Jesus said **my** church, not **the** church, not **a** church. My church.*

The Greek *Ekklēsia* describes *Church* as those who leave their homes and assemble in public places. Could that mean those who leave their comfortable residences? Leaving a contained structure. One thing we can be certain of is that it's a calling out. It apparently is not a calling *in*. We've heard the phrase “Go you therefore into all the world”; and when Jesus went out to be in the world, he did an awful lot of calling people out, primarily those disciples willing to follow him.

Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do they say that I am?” They answer several names that are not Jesus. Then Peter says, “You're the Messiah, Son of the living God!” Jesus answers, “Blessed are you, Peter, on this rock I will build “*My Church*.” How odd this is. Did they have churches then as we know them? If he said that today, we might be a little confused. We might ask which one and name off many different churches just like the disciples named off different names for Jesus. As I said, in the Greek *Ekklēsia*, *Church* is defined as (1) a gathering of people called out of their homes into a public place and (2) any gathering of people assembled by chance, tumultuously.

Evidently this was not a good enough definition, and some commentators add to this definition of Church/*Ekklēsia*. They add more definitions under the heading, *In a Christian sense*.

“In a Christian sense” it says,

1. An assembly of people to worship religiously.
2. Those who are hoping for eternal salvation.
3. Those Christians who gather in any town and become one body.
4. Those who are faithful Christians.

It all began to seem very odd to me, Jesus' statement ‘*my church*.’ It slowly poked the bubble of my past interpretations with many more questions.

I had to look closer at it to discover those questions.

Jesus said, “Peter, blessed are you for this was not revealed to you by men.” Then he sternly tells the disciples not to tell anyone who he is. What? Isn't it kind of important? What if they did tell others like, “Hey Burford, Jesus is the Messiah!” What if Burford is asked by Jesus, “*Who are they saying I am and who do you say I am?*” “Well,” says Burf, “The disciples said ‘Messiah,’ but to me you are ‘Divine Compassion.’ It's what I've needed.”

“Blessed are you Burford. For that was revealed by your experience with my father in heaven, not by the disciples.”

Here’s my question to us today as we invoke the mystery in whom we live and move and have our being. How does this mystery reveal itself to you and me? Where do we find the divinity of God in the world? Is it only revealed once a week in a church building? Or is it found in the church of humanity out there? Is it a way of worshiping or is it a way of being?

Why did the fundamentalist evangelicals feel the need to add to *Ekklēsia* with an added group of definitions subtitled ‘In a Christian sense’?

The Christian sense? What does that mean, ‘in a Christian sense’?

It seems odd that we have become churches plural, yet we are one body. It’s odd that Jesus didn’t say, “Peter, on this rock I will build my churches.” Maybe we are being called out of our church and into the my church or *The church*. Jim said last week, quoting Father Boyd, “we don’t go to the margins to change others we go to the margins to be changed.” How do we do this without making other people change, but allow the mystery to reveal itself to them? Maybe we could ask them how the mystery we call God, has revealed itself to them... accompanying them in their search for intrinsic worth and belonging to God.

How do we ‘churchy’ people get nudged off our sacred pillars and expand old thinking with a more expansive understanding of church?

There it is in the text: By the renewing of our mind. *Metanoia*: the repentance of changing the way we’re thinking. And my guess is that it is more orthodox than how we’ve interpreted it in the church boxes on every corner. Crosses at the top instead of stones, and cornerstones at the bottom as a sure foundation.

Proclamations on signage, and flyers. Bring a friend to our church. Encouraging people to come in and belong, instead of going out into our respective worlds, declaring the Anointed One’s message to greet them in their intrinsic belonging to the mystery, whether they are aware or not. How can we see God in others if we don’t philosophically and metaphysically leave our homes?

In another story, the people said to Jesus, “Hey, your mom and brothers are outside,” and he says “I am with my mother and brothers.” Boom. They hadn’t even prayed the abracadabra prayer yet! But he says they are family. They are ‘my church.’

We wait for people to come to our institutions called churches. Sure, we advertise, put banners up, and do social media blasts welcoming others to come in. But there’s a dozen different messages once you go into the church, very few of which are declaring people as being enough, just as they are, before God. No, they need more literature and more ritual to belong. Perhaps we need to touch the deep longing within humanity searching to belong.

Could it be that Peter did not mistake Jesus for another, but saw God’s anointed divinity in him? Saw him for who he was? Could Jesus’ *My Church* be a people who see others as God sees them and is a witness to the divinity of God in them?

I know it stretches us. But isn’t that what the renewing of the mind does? What *metanoia* is? What it takes for transformation? When we see others in their declared intrinsic identity of divine belonging, perhaps, we see the *My Church* of Jesus upon which all things are built.

Perhaps *My Church* are people who see individuals the way God sees them, as inhabitants of God’s divinity.

**Amen.**

## Opening Songs

### **Be Still**

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)  
Be Still, know that I am God

### **To Everything There is a Season**

(The Concordia Choir, Rene' Clausen)

To everything turn, turn, turn. There is a season turn, turn, turn.  
And a time for every purpose under Heaven A time to be born, a time to die.  
A time to plant, a time to reap. A time to kill, a time to heal. A time to laugh, a time to weep. *Refrain*  
A time to build up, a time to break down. A time to dance, a time to mourn.  
A time to cast away stones. A time to gather stones together. *Refrain*  
A time of love, a time of hate. A time of war, a time of peace.  
A time you may embrace. A time to refrain from embracing. *Refrain*  
A time to gain, a time to lose. A time to rain, a time to sow.  
A time for love, a time for hate. A time for peace, I swear it's not too late.

## Bible Passage

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## Touchpoint

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **Will You Come and Follow Me (The Summons)**

(John L. Bell, The Cathedral Singers)

Will you come and follow me, If I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know,  
And never be the same? Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known?  
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name? Will you care for cruel and kind,  
And never be the Same? Will you risk the hostile stare, Should your life attract or scare?  
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see, If I but call your name? Will you set the prisoners free, And never be the same? Will you kiss  
the leper clean, And do such as this unseen, And admit to what I mean, In you and you in me?  
Will you love the 'You' you hide, If I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside,  
And never be the same? Will you use the faith you've found, To reshape the world around,  
Through my sight and touch and sound, In you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true, When you but call my name. Let me turn and follow you,  
And never be the same. In your company I'll go, Where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I'll move and live and grow, In you and you in me.

## The Meal

### **Lord's Prayer**

(Robert Stone, Salisbury Cathedral Boys Choristers, Salisbury Cathedral Lay Vicars, David Halls)

## Benediction

### **God Be With You 'Til We Meet Again**

(Discovery Singers)

God be with you till we meet again; By his counsels guide, uphold you; With his sheep securely fold you.  
God be with you till we meet again. Amen