

8/23/26
13th Sunday after Pentecost
For Group Meetings from August 16th – August 22nd

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: O God, with all your faithful followers of every age, we praise you, the rock of our life. Be our strong foundation and form us into the body of your Son, that we may gladly minister to all the world, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER:

Share: How did last week's scripture (Matthew 15:21-28) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: Matthew 16:13-20

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Where does Jesus take the disciples and why might the location matter?
2. Who do people say, as relayed by the disciples, is the "Son of Man"?
3. What do you notice about Peter's answer? What does he actually say about Jesus?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Who has helped you understand who Jesus is?
2. Who is Jesus to you right now?
3. Has your answer to the previous question changed over the years? What experiences changed it?

Memorize this verse: "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." (Matthew 16:19) Who has given you "keys" in your life (authority, responsibility, or influence) and how have you used that power?

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 138. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

This week's reading probably ranks among my least favorite lectionary editorial choices because of how the lectionary divides it into two parts, disrupting what feels like the narrative integrity of the story. In short, it's just really, really hard for me to read this week's praise and affirmation of Peter apart from next week's reversal and rebuke as he gains far more insight into the depth and cost of his confession. On one hand, I understand the choice. It's clearly important for Matthew to give Peter this moment in the sun. He's inherited a far sparser account of Peter's confession from Mark (8:27-30) that leads more quickly into the lengthier description of Peter's confusion. Matthew offers both more description and more praise perhaps because he is grounding future pastoral or priestly or teaching authority or communal identity in and on Peter, the rock on which Jesus will build his church. And so, pausing after these verses seems to give Peter his due in a way that accords with Matthew's construction of the scene. But it occurs to me that this pause to recognize Peter's confession might be important for us to consider as well. Peter will go on to completely misunderstand what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, he will later resist Jesus' intention to turn himself over to the authorities, and he will eventually deny and desert his Lord. But for now, in just this moment, he confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. And that's something for which to give thanks.

There is so much going on in the world and in our lives that needs our effort and work and passion and commitment. We are being called to confess Christ in both word and deed. At one and the same time we that know there is so much more to do than we seem able to do and that even our best efforts and most heartfelt attempts will fall short, not living as deeply or truly into our confession as we should, and at times getting confused or scared about what that confession means. And yet, there are moments when we confess, when we do something right, when we perceive more of God's purpose than previously, when things come together if only briefly, and when we sense God's spirit at work in us and among us. And at those moments, it makes sense to pause and give thanks. One of the key lines for me in reading this familiar passage this time around is Jesus' additional declaration about Peter's confession: "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (v. 17). God was at work in Peter. Yes, he would screw up mightily, but in this moment God was at work and that is always cause for celebration and thanksgiving.

So, this week we might look around our community (church, home, etc.) and see what is going right. Notice and name where God is at work. Lift up, celebrate, and give thanks for those things where we sense the presence of the living God. Big or small, obvious or easy to overlook, there are places in our lives where God's presence is manifest and our confession is clear. This is not for one moment to overlook all that still needs to be done, the important issues of the day, the vital nature of our confession in deeds as well as words, or the many, many who need us to stand up for them more boldly than previously. But it is to assert that the living God is at work in our community and in each of our lives, and if we can't sense and celebrate and give thanks for God being present in small things, how are we ever going to claim God's power and providence in larger things? Gratitude is a powerful thing. Or, perhaps more accurately, gratitude is an empowering thing. And this reading gives us a chance to give thanks that we might be open to what God will do with us and for us and through us next.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen