

## Laying the Foundation

Matthew 16:13-19

Can you believe it? I find it amazing that God heard your prayers and orchestrated this whole thing just to bring Donna back home to you. In the process of God answering your prayers look what she brought with her, me. All seriousness aside I must tell you that Donna and I are absolutely and totally filled with praise and thanksgiving to God for His allowing us the privilege and honor to be back with you in worship and ministry. We come with a tremendous amount of excitement and anticipation about all of the possibilities that God will be bringing before us during the coming years; possibilities of seeing God do great and mighty things through each and every one of us that make up His Church. It is with this understanding that I begin our time of worship with a verse I have quoted many times over the years but today, I bring this passage to you in a way that means more to me right now than it ever has in the past. Psalms 118:24;

*“This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it!”*

This morning I want to lay the foundation for what many of us here this morning believe will be a ministry of seeing God do great and mighty things through His people. I know that for a fact because that is what God said He would do in Jeremiah 33:3-

*“Call out to me and I will answer you and I will show you great and mighty things that you know not of.”*

Earlier in Jeremiah God tells His people in 29:11-

*I know the plans that I have for you; plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.”*

Listen, whenever I open the pages of God’s Word, this is what I read. This is a theme from God’s heart that runs throughout scripture. It is

there in the Old Testament and it is there in the words and teachings of Jesus. It is there in the letters of the Apostle Paul, Peter, James, and John. Over and over again we read about God's heart. He puts His heart out there in the pages of His Word and one of those truths about His heart is that He desires to bless His people. He desires to open the windows of heaven and pour out upon us, His people, blessing upon blessing.

This leads me to a very important question. We are talking about laying down a foundation upon which we are going to build our lives upon and in turn, build the ministry of this church upon. This question is critical because how you answer will determine the direction your life will take and by doing so, will determine the direction the Trinity UMC will take as we move forward. You see, we make up the church. As the hymn says, and I am sure you have sung it,

"I am the Church, you are the Church, we are the Church together."

Therefore it stands to reason that if we are the church then our response to this question that I am about to ask is critical; critical to your own walk with God and critical to the direction the Trinity UMC takes during the coming years. You see, if we are going to be the people God wants us to be, and if we are going to be the church God wants us to be, we need to first answer this question;

Who is Jesus Christ to you, right now, at this moment? When you think of who Jesus Christ is, how do you answer that question? Who is He to you?

Jesus knew how critical the answer to this question would be. He must have because he brought this question to the forefront of the disciple's thinking. He needed to ask this question of his disciples, especially that core group of Peter, James, and John. How they answered that question was critical to what Jesus had come to do. Yes, He had come to pay the price for our sin and He did that on the cross. Yes, He had come to

conquer death by rising up from the grave and He did that by walking out of the tomb on Easter morning. But that was not the end of the story. His Church needed to be born. He knew that His Church would need to be built and for that to happen a foundation had to be laid. Jesus had come to launch a ministry that would need to ultimately change the world and that ministry of changing hearts would begin in Jerusalem, move out into Judea, and then into Samaria, and then to the remotest parts of the earth. (Acts 1:8) It would be these followers of His that would lead the way. They would be on the cutting edge. In starting this new Church they would face trials, hardship, persecution, death, and if they were going to face these challenges victoriously they would have to first get this question squared away in their hearts and minds.

Read Matthew 16: 13-19

*“Who do people say that I am?”* If you were to walk outside the walls of this church and begin to ask people on the sidewalk, in the grocery stores, in the classrooms, “Who do you think Jesus is?” you would probably get a wide range of responses like Jesus received when He asked this question.

Since I have come to know Christ as my personal Savior I have had the privilege of sharing my faith one on one with hundreds of non-believers. I made that decision during my freshman year at that location of higher learning which many have called “the Harvard of the South” which many of you will know right away what great institution of higher learning I am referring to. For those who don’t know it is what many people call Georgia Southern University, the “Harvard of the South.” Since I made the decision to receive Christ into my heart I have engaged students, adults, internationals, and people from all walks of life through sharing my faith with them and when I do I like to ask them the same question, “Who do you think Jesus is in history?” The answers that are given can tell the interviewer very quickly where someone is spiritually. Invariably I have received pretty much the same answers

Jesus received from the report of the disciples. He was a great teacher, a prophet, a figment of some writer's imagination, a prophet like Mohammed.

But what others said about Jesus was not the real issue here. Jesus already knew what the people were saying about Him. His first question was just a prelude to the real question, the critical question, a question that each one of His followers had to answer in their own heart and mind. It is the same question I am asking you right now.

Imagine Jesus standing before you right now and He is looking right into your eyes and into your heart and He asks you, *"Who do YOU say that I am?"* This was not some theological question that Jesus was asking. This was not a seminary professor asking his students to ponder the essence of Christ's existence. The spiritual lives of these followers of Christ hinged on their response. The future existence of the Church hung in the balance according to their understanding. It was Peter that would utter the words that would echo down through history, all the way to us today. It would be his words that would be the foundation upon which Christ would build His Church. It would be his words that would cause ground to be broken for the construction of His Church.

*"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God!"*

It was Peter that would declare that Christ is Lord. It is Peter who would proclaim that Jesus is above all things and that He was and is and always will be Lord of all creation. It would be that understanding that would grow. Like a tiny mustard seed this understanding would grow and mature. Before the cross and the empty tomb Jesus was called many names; teacher, master, Rabbi. But when he died on the cross He became Savior and when He walked out of the tomb He would no longer be called teacher. He would be called, Lord!

This proclamation that Peter made would develop into a deeper understanding. His statement of faith would mature as the Holy Spirit

brought understanding and awareness and as lives were radically changed by that belief. Hear me when I say the word, “belief”. Hear me as I say it again, “their lives were radically changed by that belief.” I don’t use that word loosely. I don’t mean belief in the casual sense of the word; “I believe it might rain today.” “I believe I will run get a bite to eat.” I am referring to the Greek word for the word “belief”. It means, “complete trust in”, “a resting of one’s whole life in.” Let me illustrate what I mean.

### Chair illustration

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came and for the first time in all of Biblical history, God placed His life into the hearts of those who believed. They had placed their lives completely into the heart of God and now His life filled them and the Lordship of Christ became a life changing belief for them. It meant for them a total and complete surrender of one’s whole life, and I mean by their whole life; their families, their possessions, their social calendar, their jobs, everything was surrendered over to Him. For them, proclaiming the Lordship of Christ became the foundation of their lives, their existence; that proclamation became their identity. They knew who they belonged to. They knew where they were going because they knew that Jesus Christ was their Lord.

So it is in response to proclaiming Jesus Christ is Lord that Jesus responded to Peter, “Peter, upon this rock I will build MY Church and not even the gates of Hell will prevail against it!”

You see, when we fully and completely realize that Jesus Christ is Lord and He is the One building the church, then such an awareness should have a profound impact on the way we see the ministry of the church and the way we do church. The church does not belong to the finance committee, it doesn’t belong to the church council, or the staff-parish team. It doesn’t belong to me, to Charles, to the choir, it doesn’t belong to the District Superintendent, the Bishop, the North Georgia Conference, it doesn’t belong to the united Methodist Church. This

church belongs to Jesus Christ, He said to Peter “it is MY Church”. It all belongs to Him and He is the One doing the building and brothers and sisters, let us never, ever, ever, forget that truth.

Many of you stood at the altar of this church and you joined this fellowship and you made a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ that you would support this church with your prayers, your presence, your giving, your service, and your witness.

That is why I stand before you without apology and say that we need to get on our knees and pray for the Church. We need to lift up the church staff, the ministries of the church, and the needs of those who are hurting because this is His Church. That is why every one of our meetings and gatherings in this church need to begin and end with prayer. And when we pray and ask God to meet our needs, to do great and mighty things in us and through us, we should ask with the complete confidence that He is hearing every word because this is His Church and He is all about blessing His Church.

That is why I stand before you today and I say that when you wake up on Sunday morning and you are tired because of a football game, or a party, or whatever the night before, or you wake up and it is cold, or raining, or whatever, I know where you need to be and you know where you need to be. It is His Church and this is where He wants us to be. It cost Him a lot in order for us to have this privilege of gathering with our brothers and sisters around His throne and worshipping Him. It took a crown a thorns, 39 lashes with a whip with pieces of bone and metal tied to the straps, it took a merciless beating at the hands of soldiers. It took nails in His hands and feet as He was nailed to the cross. It took His sacrifice on the cross and yet how easily we sacrifice worship for sleep, ball games, convenience.

That is why I stand before you this morning without apology and say that when it is shared that servants are needed to help in making a particular ministry such as VBS happen, or to meet a need in our

nursery, or youth ministry, or Sunday School, or some particular mission project; what follows should be a waiting list of servant volunteers excited about jumping in and meeting that need. We should line up in droves because this is the Lord's Church and when we get involved by serving others we become a part of Jesus's building project.

I stand before you without apology and say that it when it comes to the managing of your money the Lord better have top priority and the Church ought to be the first place you look when that money starts going out of your bank account because the Church is His Church and what He builds lasts for an eternity. What better place can we invest the money we have than right here, in that which lasts for eternity!

To recognize that He is Lord and that we are a part of His building project then it should change our whole perspective on how we view the church.

We have surrendered our lives to Jesus Christ. He is our Lord! This is the foundation upon which we build our lives. What is true for us is true for the Church. Jesus Christ is Lord of His Church. We must lay this down as our foundation for all that we do as a church. He is the Cornerstone of the Church. Every decision we make as a church, every act of ministry we do as a church, every meeting that is held in this church should have this as our foundation, Jesus Christ is our Cornerstone, He is Lord!