

Christ Presbyterian Church
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Faithful: Living Stones | Matthew 16:13-17

Well, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Jake. I just joined the staff here a couple of months ago as the Connections Pastor and this is my first time getting to do the message with you. I'm excited for where we are today in this season. As I was getting ready with this message, I realized what a fun season my wife Angela and I are in when it comes to parenting. We have a two-year-old and he is full of life and full of questions. Now we've already had two two-year-olds; we have a 5-and-a-half-year-old and a four-year-old, so we know that two is just a really special time. You know, from about eighteen months to a little older than two, they're learning all kinds of words and learning how to talk and form questions. My two-year-old, Evan, was on this kick a few weeks ago of asking this question over and over again. He saw this little scar on my chin and he got really concerned because one day I made a really poor choice of doing something and it's been there for a really long time, and he looks and he goes, "Da-ie, wa happen?" It's so cute, believe it's way more adorable when he says it, just picture a two-year-old say, "Wa happen?" And we get stuck in traffic on 100 here, that doesn't happen to any of you I'm sure, but as we were waiting, we see this train stopped on the Excelsior bridge over there, and he was really concerned about it as we watched it for ten minutes just not going anywhere, "Da-ie, da-ie, wa happen train? Wa happen, da-ie?" All day and later on in the day, "Da-ie, wa happen train?" And I'd have to explain to him again it was just waiting and "Otay, da-ie, otay." And I know this question is going to come up again sometime soon because when I start cheering for the guys in purple and gold instead of the guys in blue and orange in Chicago, that's where we moved from—because the guys in Chicago are making it really easy and so are the guys in purple and gold, making it 3-0 is kind of nice—he's just going to go, "Da-ie, wa happen?" *Better stop playing defense, son, that's what happened!* Makes it easy.

Here's the deal. When something is out of the ordinary, something leaves its mark, something changes drastically, "What happened?" is a natural question to ask. And that's the question I think we want to focus on today. In this series, Faithful, we've been looking at the milestones, the markers, that show us and point us to these metaphors that help us see—and call us to—God's faithfulness, and help us refocus our faithfulness as well. A pile of stones in the center of a riverbed or on the side of the road causes the people of Israel to ask the question, "What happened?" And they would hear the stories of God's faithfulness told over and over again. The crumbling and cracked rocks of the temple walls and Jerusalem's walls cause the people to ask, "What happened?" And then they called on God's faithfulness and asked for help rebuilding those walls. A church celebrating its 60th anniversary, that was started and founded on

Christ the Cornerstone and that cornerstone becomes this symbol—this symbol that people for decades have looked back and seen and celebrated the faithfulness of God. Today we are going to focus on the visible, tangible metaphors for God's faithfulness now that find their home, not in bricks and mortar, and not in monuments, but in living and breathing beings.

Peter, the guy who walked on water, just weeks after Christ was executed, stands up and says to the very crowds that killed Him, "That Christ that you killed, He's risen." That same Peter is the one who got to lead the beginning of a movement that all churches can trace our roots back to. That Peter writes to the churches that were part of that early movement and he says these words:

⁴ As you come to him, Jesus, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. [1 Peter 2:4-5]

You also, meaning people in the church, you are like living stones being built up. People of the church are the visible display; we get to be the visible display of God's presence in this world.

If we study the life of Peter though, we see he gets to be a part of a lot of incredible things, but we will also see he doesn't always get it right. We see that following Jesus is a journey for Peter. He didn't just one day encounter Jesus and poof, behind his head was a halo and he had this glowing aura when he went around. That's not what happened in Peter's life. There's no doubt that Peter's life was drastically changed forever when he met Jesus, but we also see, like most of us, that his obedience meandered. There were times he got it right, but there were times he was outright obstinate toward Jesus. Two times at least, when Jesus gave a command, he says to Jesus, "No. No, Lord, I won't do it." Jesus wants to wash his feet, "No, not me." I mean, this is Peter who we know, a lot of us know the story of when he denied Jesus, denied even knowing Him. It's a journey for Peter. We look at Peter's journey of becoming the living stone and being in a place where he's challenging us to do that same thing—to be living stones—it begins with this question of mine: what happened?

If you have your Bible and you want to follow along, we're looking at the biography of Jesus in the Book of Matthew in chapter 13. If you have your smart phones and you want to follow along (and you're not checking your Fantasy Football team to make sure you got the right players in) you can do that as well. I understand; it happens! Here are the words, and they're on the screens as well if you don't want to follow along in the Bibles. And really, at this point in the biography of Jesus, it's important to know that Jesus has been doing all sorts of things—all sorts of signs and miracles, healing people, casting out demons, feeding thousands of people with just a couple of loaves of bread and some fish, and He's teaching people all the different things about the kingdom that's coming, and they're some radical teachings, so Jesus has this big crowd following Him and He kind of gets away from the crowd and this is where we pick up in verse 13.

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he questioned his disciples, [So, he's with the twelve men that he had been apprenticing and He asks them to come along and follow Him, and He asks them this question:] "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or maybe one of the prophets." [Matthew 16:13-14]

Apparently, who people say Jesus is, matters. Is Jesus self-conscious? Is He worried about what other people say about Him? From what the disciples say, it sounds like the majority of people saw Jesus in the way that people most wanted to see Him. People were desperate for God to send some sort of conqueror to overcome the Romans. They had been crying out for hundreds of years. If it wasn't the Romans, it was the Meads, or the Persians, or the Babylonians. They were always highly taxed and had a high demand on them, and they had almost no rights. They were living in their promised land, so they wanted a hero—they wanted someone to lead the revolution to overturn their circumstances, change the way things were. They wanted Jesus to be that person. Since we aren't technically under any oppression by an occupying nation, I don't think our response would be the same. Our answers may be different, but I think our expectations of who Jesus is tend to be the same. We have expectations of Him. We want Jesus to be who we want Him to be.

If we ask this question today what might people say? Maybe the responses might look more like Ricky Bobby in Talladega Nights. You guys know that movie? I'm not going to show the clip, don't worry, risky business there, but Ricky Bobby, played by Will Ferrell, is a race car driver. He's around the table with his family and he's going to give thanks for the food and he says, "Dear 8 pound, 6 ounce little infant Jesus . . ." and afterward he gets done praying and his buddy has a different version of Jesus. He says, "I like to think of Jesus with giant eagle's wings, singing lead vocals for Lynyrd Skynyrd, like an angel band leading behind Him . . ." It's kind of a Jesus who looks a little bit like Rich Phenow if you know him, yeah. Maybe it's not sweet baby Jesus or rock band Jesus, maybe it's this Jesus, buddy Jesus, right? He's a nice guy, he's a good friend, he just wants to be your friend, he just wants to be your pal. He does nice kindhearted things, he's compassionate—doesn't really want to get into your business, though, just wants you to be happy, just wants to be your friend.

Now before I offend any of you with the rest of the pictures that I show, and it has a distraction, understand that these are magnified versions of a reality in our lives. Maybe we don't actually think Jesus looked like that or looks like that, but we certainly have Him function like that in our lives. There are caricatures by somebody--maybe they're being cynical, or maybe they're being for real, this is what they think of Jesus—but it comes from some sense of truth. Maybe it's not buddy Jesus, maybe it's hand-sanitizer Jesus, the Mr. Clean Jesus. He's clean and pristine, and carries around a bottle of Purell on his cloak. He's not eager to get too close to the dirty, grimy, messy, broken people out there, and if He does, He immediately takes out his Purell and sanitizes himself from the sin. Or maybe it's lumberjack Jesus, an ultimate fighting Jesus, a man's man Jesus; He kicks butt, He uses swear words, He takes names. Jesus who is

here to reclaim masculinity. Or maybe it's Guru Jesus—he's a good teacher among a lot of good teachers. Or maybe it's American Jesus—the Jesus who says, "Pull yourself up by the boot straps." A God-blesses-those-who-bless-themselves Jesus. Or my favorite, hipster Jesus—hanging out in coffee shops, drinking Americanos and dreaming about how to change the world.

One of my favorite authors is Alan Hirsch, a guy who talks a lot about mission and how we are the ones sent to the world. He says this, "Show us your Jesus and we'll show you who you are."

If we're being honest, we often make Jesus look a lot more like us than we want to admit, don't we? I'll say for me, you say for you. I've made Jesus into a version of me that is much more manageable and fits into my life than the Jesus I read about in the Bible.

I remember back about ten years ago, my Jesus looked a lot more like the hand sanitizer, Mr. Clean Jesus. You kind of had to have your act together if you wanted to approach that Jesus, and I didn't have my act together. Things I was struggling with that I thought, *why haven't I dealt with these things, yet?* Insecurities, compulsions, whatever they would be, anger issues, whatever those things were and I was like, *you know what? I need to get my act together.* It's messy and so I would make a promise: Jesus, I'll do better next time, and then I would try harder and I would mess up and have guilt and shame, and then I would make another promise and try harder, and then I would mess up and feel guilt and shame, and this cycle continued over and over again because I couldn't bring this stuff to clean, hand sanitizer Jesus—He doesn't want to touch that. But doesn't Jesus say to cast our burdens on Him? Doesn't He say, "Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest"? Doesn't He say He will deal with our sins? So, I would never bring those sins and struggles to Him. That's me, now you say for you.

Back to the disciples. Jesus says, "Who do you say I am? What about you?" I imagine the disciples in that moment kind of looking around . . . a few of them look down kicking stones . . . *don't make eye contact; He's going to call on you.* John is grabbing his brother James's hand, trying to raise it for him, volunteering on his behalf. It's a lot easier to answer the question when it's other people's ideas . . . what about your own? Finally Simon Peter speaks up, "You are the Christ, You're the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Up until now, Peter has just been called Simon, and here, based on this confession, Jesus gives him this new name, Peter, which means small rock. Jesus who is the rock, the foundation, the cornerstone says, you're a little rock. You are a rock like Me, and tells Peter and the disciples on this rock . . . on this impulsive, blue-collared, uneducated, ordinary guy who doesn't have his act together and probably not going to have his act together for some time . . . on this guy, on this person making this confession, Jesus will assemble His church. He will build not by actual brick and stone and mortar, but with

people. The called-out ones—that's what the word church means here—the called-out ones that will work together to carry out this mission of the kingdom together.

See, the effectiveness of the church rests in our willingness to fully know Jesus and let Jesus fully form us. To fully know Jesus means to see him as Peter does. "You are the Christ—the son of the living God." Another word for Christ would be Messiah or Chosen One. The Israelites believed that someday God would send His Messiah, His Savior, to rescue them. They were desperate for a savior, but that's not what the people were calling Jesus, and it's not what a lot of people call Jesus today, is it? "You are the Christ" means proclaiming to Jesus: You are the Chosen One sent by God to bring about the redemption, not just of the small things, but of all creation. Savior from sin and death. Savior from the brokenness and decay in our world. It's much easier to have a Savior of our own making though, isn't it? Like, I just want a Savior to come into my circumstances, to save me from the consequences of some of my unwise choices or maybe save me from the fluctuations of the stock market. Save me from the people on the left or save me from the people on the right or whatever it might be. But he's saying Savior, rescue from the mess and chaos, rescue from myself. "Jesus the Christ" is saying Jesus is the rescuer from all that went wrong, is wrong, and will be wrong with our broken world. He is the rescuer from the backwards, selfish, self-focused, self-reliant, self-absorbed, self-serving brokenness that we cannot escape.

You, Jesus, are the Son of the living God. That phrase would have been pretty common in Jesus' day. "Son of the living God." Actually, people used it to refer to Cesar sometimes, and it was kind of believed that Cesar had the divine running through his blood, that he was king on behalf of the god's ruling, he was a god himself. So this phrase, this confession of Peter has some serious implications socially, politically, spiritually. Peter's saying, "You're the Ruler, You're the Emperor, You're the Lord, You're the King, You have the final word, You have the final say, not just in this little area of the world, but over everything." From that confession, Peter gets a new name—the Rock, the solid one with whom the future of the church rests on. It took Peter a while to live up to the name. He tries and at times, misses the mark, but Peter keeps coming back to this—Jesus the Rescuer and Ruler of his life. Peter, the living stone that lets Jesus continue to form and reform and conform him into who God created him to be.

When we fully understand who Jesus is, we allow Jesus to fully form us into who we are called to be—that group of people who believe, and confess, and live out in word and in deed—that group of people. This truth about who Jesus is as Savior and Lord, Rescuer and Ruler—that gathering of people will go into the world with such power and passion that the schemes and forces of evil that try to come up against it doesn't stand a chance.

I'll give you a picture of how this has most recently played out in my life. It was the Friday before Mother's Day, and my wife, Angela, was working late. I knew that on Sunday she would be working late as well, so it was kind of one of those things that we just knew wasn't going to work out for us to celebrate with our kids kind of the way we'd want to. So, I texted her and said, "Hey, what do you think of me dropping the kids off at

your mom's house and then heading off to go see Robin?" Now Robin is a woman I hadn't seen in over twenty years, not since my sophomore year of high school. Robin's the woman who gave birth to me, she's my mom. Angela said, "I think you could do that" and so this might be my last chance, maybe my only chance, I don't know because we're going to be moving to Minnesota, who knows what will happen, but I should go. So I texted my mom and said, "Mom, I know it will be really hard, but would it be okay if I came and saw you on Sunday?" We worked out the details and I set out on my way that Sunday. When I got there, I was supposed to meet her outside her apartment, but she wasn't there. I went inside and she buzzed me up. The elevator just stunk like stale cigarettes and dirty clothes. It was pretty clear that this housing place that she lived in wasn't great. I could see that all her life she hadn't been living in great places much at all. It just showed me how hard her life was—the florescent lights in the hallway were flickering and I went up to the fourteenth floor, all the way down the hallway, and I stood at her door for a second. As I knocked I could hear shuffling and then she whispered, "Oh my gosh." How long had it taken her to be ready to answer that door? I heard the handle jingle a little bit, she opened the door, and there stood this stranger--someone I didn't know, but had hurt me worse than anybody else in my life. When I was four she walked out. She struggled with alcoholism her whole life and she got in an argument with my dad about something, and it's kind of the beginning of the end, and I have a vivid picture of her grabbing this multi-colored afghan blanket out of my dad's hands and slamming the door. After that she just faded out of our lives. You can imagine that brought with it some insecurities, fears, anger, bitterness, and all sorts of other things. She opened the door and there she was. I hugged her and said, "Happy Mother's Day." I gave her the flowers and a picture of my family, my wife and kids. I sat down on the vinyl couch and just soaked it in for a minute. I don't know the word—I don't know if there is a word for the emotions—because it was like all of them.

Early that morning I had gone to church and I don't remember anything of the message or what happened except for during Communion, I sat. And as I sat, I was weeping because I was just overcome, not by what I was about to do, but by what Jesus had already done in my life. All these reminders of all the ways He had shown up despite the brokenness in my world...that even though after my mom left, a stepmom came into our lives and taught me how to tie my shoes, and how to balance a checkbook, and how to treat people well, and how to mind my manners—all the things moms are supposed to do. That mom, for years and years, made sure we were in church every Sunday and that church changed my life.

I was reminded about all the times my mom forgot my birthday, and it hurt really, really bad. But over the years, I started to develop an understanding of what forgiveness and grace look like. There was that last time that she didn't show up, and I was reminded of that, and I was reminded about that moment when I was in my deepest pain, I was met simultaneously with the most grace and comfort that I could ever have, and it's all because of Jesus, the one that points us to the cross and points us to the love of the Father. I was reminded that the cross is what sin looks like in the hands of love. It's what love looks like in the hands of sin, and all of that came rushing at me that morning. So as I sat in that seat and listened, I was able to extend to my mom what over and

over again had been extended to me.

As I left that day, she said again, “I can’t say sorry enough. I can’t ask for your forgiveness enough”. I just so desperately wanted her to feel redemption and rescue from that, and I said, “Mom, you’re forgiven. Live in that forgiveness”, but this is the first time that those words were accompanied by actions.

Here’s the thing . . . as heavy a story as that is, it’s good, good, good, good news. It’s really good news, because Jesus is my Ruler and Rescuer. He’s making me more fully into who I am created me to be—anger, and bitterness, hatred, retaliation, insecurity, addiction, or whatever other word you want to throw in there, doesn’t stand up against this. It doesn’t stand up against Jesus who is Ruler and Rescuer. It doesn’t stand up to Jesus who is making us and forming us into who He’s called us to be, who we’re called to be.

One theologian says this, “If Christians are not conformed in their lives and their truth, there’s effectively no truth.” If, through your encounters with Jesus, somewhere along the way you haven’t been changed or challenged, or you’re not experiencing some form of transformation, or restoration, or reconciliation, then maybe it wasn’t Jesus that you met, or maybe the Jesus that you met over the years has been skewed into something He’s not. Jesus is Rescuer and Ruler, and if you reach out to Him today, He’s not far from any of us. Or maybe it’s not that for you. Maybe you’ve got all of Jesus, but you haven’t let Jesus have all of you. Maybe today for the first time, or maybe the first time in a long time, you’re going to say, *I’m just going to surrender all of me so that Jesus can form me into who He’s made me to be.* In a few minutes when we take Communion, you’ll have a chance to come forward and take Communion, if you’re kind of just saying, *I really want to rediscover the reality and the fullness of who Jesus is, or I want Jesus to get into all of my life* then I just encourage you and I invite you to spend some time with the Prayer Team sharing a little bit of your story and just receiving some prayer. If you’re somebody who says *this is the kind of place, these are the kind of people that I really feel like I want to be a part of.* And if you’re not a member here and you’re saying, *I really want to figure out what it’s like to be connected and committed to this group,* I encourage you next week to sign up for the New Member Process. Journey with us and discover what it’s like to join together with us in this. If you’re somebody who is like *I’m good with those things* I’d encourage you to head up to Anderson Hall and do that Zambia schoolhouse project, because that’s a partnership that we have, and maybe that will spark in you this idea of what it means to step into being living stones—to give this life to the places where evil and the forces of evil are trying to work against the good and great grace of Jesus, and that we can step into that and say, *no, that’s not how it’s going to go.* Maybe that’s Zambia, or maybe it will spark something in you.

I pray and hope that the invitation Jesus makes will be something that we grab hold of and people around us will ask, “What’s happening?” That when we gather together in the ways that we’re living so that the people outside of these walls will say, “What’s happening over there when you gather at the four-steeple building? What’s happening to you because I want that to happen to me?” May we be a place that invites people into

that, because we're experiencing something that's transforming and changing and forming us. Will you pray with me?

Jesus, thank You for the opportunity we have to gather. God, we just confess to You. There are times we want to make You, Jesus, into something that You're not. Help us get a full picture of who You really are. Jesus, we offer ourselves to You to fully form us into who You've called us to be, and God, we ask for boldness and strength as we go out as living stones, going up against the forces of evil that will not stand up against who You've called us to be. I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.