**“The Rock is Jesus”**

Isaiah 51:1-6

Romans 11:33—12:8

Matthew 16:13-20

 Pentecost 12

“From **Him**” Romans tells us “and through **Him** and to **Him** are all things. To **Him** be glory forever. Amen.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

Often, this especially Gospel text from Matthew is preached in **reverse order**. It (most often) begins or culminates in a **concept of “church”** as the pinnacle … a concept of “church” that may or may not resemble what Jesus called, here, “**My** **Church**” / “**His**” (the entity that “**He would build**”). Now, don’t get me wrong, the text does **get there**. “Church” is the **result** **of what foundations it,** **creates it / “builds” it**, **THAT** is its “ground-breaker” and “corner-piece”, and that corner-piece is **from-where** everything else extends its part of the construction, but buildings or (more closely accurate) even the collective of people huddled together on Sunday mornings become, most often, the **focus** of thoughts on this text, as do Peter’s words or even Peter himself become its topic. All of those are **extensions** as leaves are on the ends of tree branches, but **buried into the ground** is the **trunk that’s of heavy wood (tucked into rock often-times)**, roots embedded into the earth, one (I’m thinking of in particular) buried into such as that kind of ground by soldiers and having a crossbar that they affixed to it … with a **Man** (who wasn’t **just a man**) nailed to it.

**Text**

Starting out at the tips of **that tree’s branch** we, certainly, have the results of Christ as **individuals** but (more appropriately) knowing of themselves as **members (children-together)** of a **faithful collective**. Individually, the proper ones are always humble in their heavenly family work (just doing their “**duty**”) and “thinking about themselves with **sober judgement**” as Romans describes. The last thing the faithful would do is consider themselves “**all in all**” and **self-sufficient** without need of learning and being taught and growing and being open to growing into what’s proper and deeper and closer to God (we His children, He our Father). “God assigns” (Romans says) “a measure of faith” which isn’t about **quantity**, but **quality** and **particular-ness** that’s almost never **self-defined**. It’s a portion with some uniqueness, yet some sameness with others. And its only **secretly useful** (in other words, you won’t **recognize what you’re usefulness is because that’s what humility does**: it makes the best usefulness just an **invisible duty** as far as **you’d ever notice it**).

Yet it is **collectively useful** and **faithful** as it **is, indeed, actually faithful**. Outside of **faithfulness** are gatherings, but only social gatherings of various types and experiences, but **the Church (the true Church)** has virtually **nothing of nature that binds it together … it’s un-natural**. Almost a divine comedy if you didn’t know it as **purposeful by God**, every ounce of counter-culture shows the faithful un-naturally (but divinely) **saying the same thing even though from highly different backrounds**. “The teaching of the apostles” is how the Book of Acts speaks of that (it’s what gathered people confessed at least in words in “The Way” just after Jesus’ Ascension) and we call it also the “Confession Peter made” as recorded here in Matthew 16.

I remember **being where Jesus and the 12 were when this pointed revelation happened**: Caesarea Philippi almost straight over from where Jesus had taken them in Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean where we heard them at last week, here was the **crossroads** of all of Asian, European, Persian, and African commerce. Here (in this city) was the cross-section of everybody … and the temple to the pagan worship of a Greek deity of drunkenness and sexual impurity in “Pan”. Jesus asked His disciples there (in the midst of that secularism), “Who do **people** say that the **Son of Man** is?” and the answers He got were **many**: “Some say John the Baptism, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets”, and it all sounds so contemporary as we all have our own opinions … and the opinion is **considered** more credible than the truth. “But who do you say that **I am**?” and Simon Peter replied, “You are **the Christ, the Son of the living God**.”

Rumor has it, by some, that Peter (**himself**) is the “rock” upon which Christ built His Church. His name plays on that as “Petra” is “rock” in Greek. Others would say **his confession** is that rock, and (while true) it wasn’t **his** **words that he spoke remember**. “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but **My Father who is in heaven**.” No, those **words** aren’t the whole of foundational basis of Christ’s Church, they’re **close**, but not the **Substance of it**.

See, **God the Father revealed** “**the Rock**” upon which Peter and his confession and “The Church” are founded and “gates of Hell would not be able to prevail against”. Peter’s revelation was **the Father’s revelation** … and that revelation was as **far back made** as the “Seed” spoken-of to Adam and Eve’s fall. **In Isaiah**, He was “the Rock” from which all the blessed “are hewn”, “the **quarry** from which” everything made to be faithfully blessed “was dug”. He was revealed, that “Rock” by the names of all that He brought to wield upon this earth: the heavenly Father’s “**Law**” and “**Justice for light**” (from verse 4 of Isaiah 51) and “**Righteousness**” and “**Salvation**” and His own “**Arms**” to judge (from verse, then, 5). He is the “**Who**” of Paul’s used quote from Job and the Psalmists and Moses in Deuteronomy, He is the “**Him** to be glorified forever since from **Him** and through **Him** and to **Him** are all things” both **initially created** and **re-created by the redemption of the cross**. He is **Jesus**, “**the Christ, the Son of the Living God**” and **THAT IS / HE IS** “the Rock” through **Whom** Peter and the apostles and any **faithful confession** and so **the** Church’s (wherever it stands or doesn’t). It’s the “**Measure**” / it’s **Him** b**y content and integrity**, **by accuracy and reflection and an “Amen” to only what’s His Words**, it’s **Jesus**, the guy (but not **just** a guy) pictured on the bulletin cover, divine Maker of all things with the Father, yet human as you can see He has a face to be, to die and save us, **Jesus and every Word that comes from His mouth** for us to “**listen to**” as Isaiah reminds us to do, “give attention to” or else not worship Him really at all.

**Application**

And where that can run problematic is where we **flip that upside down** thinking we as individuals are the end-all in what **we think** (each one “**interpreting**” and considering **that interpretation** of highest **value** by the strength of faith that we might have not in **Jesus** but, instead, in **faith we have** which may not be anything but **faith in** “**faith**”. Faith, actually, is **least often pointed to Jesus** but rather to **itself**, **IT** fools of a seeming life and livelihood yet is only **ITS OWN** since it props up the **self** rather than worships the **Savior** … I’ve heard it called worshiping the “**adjectives**” about Jesus (such as He is “love” by our age’s definition of the word) without worshiping the “**nouns**” of Him (love defined by **Who He is**). But faith in **faith** has no “gates of hell” defeating promises made to it. Faith in **Christ** has every good promise attached to it, so let’s stay there and intensely learn more of “**IT**” (**IT** **documented** and having **visual to those promises**). ….

The New York Times published an “op ed” piece (an opinion piece) that it titled **“What Religion Would Jesus Belong To?”** While the writer used the question as a launching point to go mostly every wrong direction with it, it’s still not a far cry from the question Jesus asked disciples (and still does) that got written-of for our reading. And the “listen to Him” insistence that got made through Isaiah is that **we care immensely what “religion” Jesus would approve of (or “bless”)**. We should **religiously care-about and for** what the Lord, Jesus, **says** … what religion **would He belong to**.

Romans gives us a continuing **project** after petitioning us for **that kind of sober judgment upon ourselves**: to **cherish and care about** our “membership in the one body of Christ”. In other words, “don’t **be** conformed to this world, but instead be **transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by **testing** (it says) you might **discern** **what really is the will of God**, **what is** **good and acceptable and perfect**”.

“**What** Religion Would Jesus Belong To?” And “**Who do you say** (**against and with** some of what all the world might) the Son of Man is?” May it **really be** (forever and in all cases) **Jesus**. In +His name. Amen.