

**Rock and Role****Matthew 16:13-20****Sunday, August 23, 2020****Beargrass Christian Church****I. INTRODUCTION.**

- A. As I said in the E-News, I would prefer to have face-to-face conversations with all of the members and friends of Beargrass.
  - 1. But that is not feasible, so if you haven't seen the video, read the E-News, or "heard through the grapevine," here we go.
  - 2. Ellen and I have been reflecting about my retirement date.
  - 3. We think it is in the best interest of our family for me to wrap things up at Beargrass and retire on October 31.
  - 4. COVID has been a big factor because it has dramatically reduced our "visitation" privileges with our triplet grandsons.
  - 5. It does not seem that COVID is going away any time soon—unfortunately, Louisville was recognized as a "red zone" by the CDC last week.
  - 6. So, if I continue to work in November and December it will jeopardize our family gatherings at Thanksgiving and Christmas.
- B. But we already have plans in place for the transition.
  - 1. The Search Team is making excellent progress—pray for them!
  - 2. Rev. Bruce Barkhauer will take the lead on the stewardship emphasis and messages in November.
  - 3. My very committed and creative colleagues and our staff are eager to cover the Advent/Christmas season.
  - 4. Our church is full of fantastic folks who will step up and help.
  - 5. We have had a wonderful experience at Beargrass and we are deeply grateful for your many years of love and support.
  - 6. We appreciate your prayers—and we will be praying for you as you begin an exciting new chapter in the life of the church!
- C. And now that a date has been set, I have spent more time reflecting on my changing roles and identity during my ministry.
  - 1. I am a PK, so the church has always been a part of my life.
  - 2. But my "formal" ministry began 40 years ago this month.
  - 3. I started my studies at Brite Divinity School at TCU in 1980.
  - 4. I met Ellen the first week of school—that's another story!
  - 5. That same week I was called to serve as a youth minister at Rockwood Christian Church on the north side of Fort Worth.
  - 6. My stay there was short because I was invited to become a student associate minister at Central Christian Church.
  - 7. That is where Ellen and I were married on December 27, 1981.
- D. Seminary graduation in 1984 opened the door for a new call to youth ministry at First Christian Church in Arlington, Texas, where I had a wonderful mentor in Dr. Arthur Digby.
- E. Then came Lakewood Christian Church in Waco, Texas.
  - 1. They took a chance and asked me to serve as their senior pastor.
  - 2. There are more Baptists than people in Waco, but in 10 years we rejoiced as we watched the church more than double in size.

- F. Then, out of the blue, a church we had never heard of came a callin' from Louisville, Kentucky, in the fall of 1996.
  1. After numerous conversations and communications, the call to come was given and we were thrilled to make the move!
  2. We limped into Louisville in that old blue Suburban we used to have in January of 1997.
  3. And by the grace of God we are profoundly grateful to still be here 24 years later!
- G. Along with changing ministerial roles came changing family roles.
  1. I started out as a son almost 65 years ago.
  2. After a couple of years, I became a brother.
  3. Years later I became a husband, father, brother-in-law, uncle, father-in-law—and now, a grandpa who is affectionately known as “Grumps.”
- H. And yet, despite all of those changing roles and responsibilities, there has been a constant, consistent identity through all of it.
- I. As long as I can remember, I have been loved, a child of God.

## II. **THAT BRINGS US TO TODAY'S STORY.**

- A. In Matthew 16, Jesus takes a brief public opinion poll.
  1. Jesus and the disciples are in the region of Caesarea Philippi.
  2. They know that he has become the talk of the towns.
- B. So, they are ready when he asks: “Who do people say that I am?”
  1. “Some say you are John the Baptist or Elijah.”
  2. “Others say you are Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”
  3. It sounds like an episode from Family Feud—you can imagine the disciples shouting, “Good answer! Good answer!”
  4. But his friends had been missing some other perspectives.
  5. Their answers are good answers—but they are “old” answers.
- C. In those days people had a keen interest in identities.
  1. The crowds had been watching Jesus for some time, but he is still an enigma because he does not fit any mold—surprise!
  2. A person’s demographics involved a “3 G” analysis—gender, genealogy, and geography—so Jesus is an outlier.
  3. God is doing a “new thing” in Jesus!
- D. Consider the information about him in Matthew up to this point.
  1. Jesus is born in a strange way and with questionable parentage.
  2. He is poor, but he threatens kings and attracts foreign diplomats.
  3. Rather than take on the family business, as expected, he becomes a wandering teacher with a motley crew of friends.
  4. Instead of getting married—also expected—he stays single.
  5. He has no income, but parties often and feeds thousands.
  6. He performs incredible miracles, but never abuses his power.
  7. He is a student of Moses but says that does not go far enough.
  8. He appears to be righteous but hangs out with the down and out.
  9. He talks about eternal life but seems obsessed with death.
- E. No wonder the people are so confused and confounded!
- F. Then he catches his friends off guard with an unexpected question.
  1. “Hey guys, what about you? Who do YOU say that I am?”
  2. This is another pivotal moment for Jesus and his disciples.
  3. Jesus cuts to the chase and gets to the heart of the matter.

- G. The question is even more dramatic when we consider the setting.
  1. Caesarea Philippi is about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.
  2. The area is loaded with religious options, history, and baggage.
  3. It is the place of the temples of ancient Ba'al worship.
  4. It is thought to be Pan's birthplace, the Greek God of nature.
  5. It is the location of the springs of the River Jordan.
  6. Caesarea Philippi is teeming with tales of ancient Judaism.
  7. And it is the site of the temple to honor the godhead Caesar.
- H. Against this backdrop, Jesus poses this critical question.
  1. He is not only asking, "Who do YOU say that I am?"
  2. He wonders, "My friends, you have all kinds of options."
  3. "Look at the diversions, distractions, and deities around you."
  4. "With all of these choices, who will you choose?"
- I. For once, Peter nails it and proclaims: "You are the Messiah!"
  1. He examines the evidence and feels that Jesus is the real deal.
  2. Jesus says: "Peter, you totally get it! God has blessed you!"
  3. "You are Petros/Peter and on this petra/rock I will build the Church!"
  4. Jesus pronounces the birth of the Church with a pun!
  5. So, for all of you who have been giving me a hard time for my puns for 24 years, if it was good enough for Jesus...(I'm just saying....)
  6. Anyway, Peter's identity changes; he knows Jesus' true identity.

### III. THE QUESTION IS ASKED OF US TODAY.

- A. Who do we say that Jesus is?
  1. What do we think about his identity?
  2. Is there any connection between our identities and his identity?
- B. In our culture and society, we have more options than ever.
  1. A multitude of other gods are trying to get our attention.
  2. And if we are using tech-toys, people are paying attention—and know who we are.
  3. It has been said that we are what we download.
  4. Techies can view our apps and figure out our age, gender, income, and marital status—with up to 80% accuracy.
  5. For example, Pinterest users are almost always women.
  6. If you are an avid Uber user, you are probably single.
  7. If you're a Yelp user you probably make over \$50,000 a year.
  8. There is a reason those pop-up ads are so creepily accurate.
  9. My wife, Ellen, complains about that almost every week and sometimes even whispers so that Alexa and Siri won't hear!
- C. So where does Jesus rank on our lists—and how does our understanding of who he is affect the way we live?
  1. How does our understanding of the "rock" shape our role?
  2. Are we easily identified because of our association with Jesus?
  3. Are we working on his behalf, imitating him in all that we do?
  4. Following Jesus may be a personal matter, but it is never private.
  5. When we are associated with him, it is an identity that sticks.
  6. Anyone we meet should be able to tell from our words, actions, compassion, and way of living that we belong to him.
- D. An author wonders about our use of the name "Jesus."

1. "What do people mean when they use the name 'Jesus?'"
  2. "Are they talking about a tamed Jesus who waves flags and promotes whatever values they think their group needs?"
  3. "Are they referring to their economic or military system through which they sanctify their greed and lust for power?"
  4. "Or are they referring to the very Source of Life who has walked among us and continues to sustain everything with his love?"
- E. One of our children, Brandon, sent a picture of a WWJD bumper sticker last week.
1. The initials have become a cliché—What would Jesus do?"
  2. But in small print on the bumper sticker there was a different message under WWJD.
  3. The phrase was: "Who would Jesus deport?"
  4. Our family chain blew up: "How could anyone say that? Can you believe they used Jesus' name in that way?!"
  5. And I almost commented...but then it occurred to me that the driver of that car may know Jesus better than we first thought?
  6. I had just preached about the Canaanite woman last week.
  7. Who would Jesus deport? ...Nobody...nobody....
- F. A blogger commented on the racism and craziness in our country.
1. She made it clear that our identity will impact the way we react.
  2. She said: "If we are following Jesus literally—then nobody's humanity is up for grabs—nobody—that is non-negotiable."
  3. She said: "So I'm hopeful...and I hope to lead that charge."
- G. I also appreciated the perspective from a pastor's editorial.
1. In the wake of recent events and with the upcoming election, he reminded us about our identity—here are a few highlights.
  2. "I join my voice with Republicans and Democrats and Independents who lament where our nation finds itself today."
  3. "From the perspective of our faith we are not Americans first."
  4. "God is bigger than our nationalism or religious affiliation."
  5. "God sent Jesus to make us human—we are humans first."
  6. "God calls us to be human in the image and likeness of Jesus."
- H. Friends, today Jesus asks us once again...
1. "Who do you say that I am?"
  2. And he wonders once again...
  3. "Who do you think you are?"