

TWELTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTACOST 8/23/20

ISAIAH 51:1-6; PSALM 138; ROMANS 12:1-8;

MATTHEW 16:13-20

GOOD MORNING

I SEE A CONNECTION BETWEEN OUR FIRST READING FROM ISAIAH IN THE FORETELLING OF THE MISSION OF THE MESSIAH AND MATTHEW'S ESTABLISHING OF THE CHURCH (THE MISSION) AND WHO CHRIST IS. SO LET'S SEE HOW THIS WORKS OUT.

THIS PASSAGE FROM ISAIAH IS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN TO OFFER CONSOLATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE ISRAELITES WHO WERE NEARING THE END OF THEIR TIME OF EXILE IN BABYLON. BUT THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET ANTICIPATE THE MISSION OF THE MESSIAH THROUGH THE PROMISES GOD MADE TO ISREAL. THE PROPHET CALLS THOSE WHO "SEEK THE LORD" TO REMEMBER THEIR ANCESTORS, ABRAHAM AND SARAH, AND THEIR HERITAGE – I.E. "THE ROCK FROM WHICH YOU WERE HEWN" AND THE QUARRY FROM WHICH YOU WERE DUG. ISAIAH'S WORDS ALWAYS SEEM TO DRAW PICTURES FOR US.

THEY ARE FURTHER REMINDED OF THE ASSURANCE THAT GOD WOULD BRING COMFORT TO ALL OF THE WASTED PLACES. ZION'S DESERT WOULD BECOME THE LORD'S GARDEN WHERE THE REDEEMED MIGHT SING WITH JOY AND THANKSGIVING.

THEY WERE TO CONTINUE TO LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD THROUGH THE PROPHET SO THAT GOD'S TEACHING WOULD REACH THEM ALL AND BRING "JUSTICE FOR A LIGHT TO THE PEOPLES".

ALTHOUGH THE OLD HEAVEN AND EARTH SHALL PASS AWAY, GOD'S SALVATION IS FOREVER. "MY SALVATION WILL NEVER BE ENDED".

PSALM 138 IS A SONG OF THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE FOR THE LORD'S FAITHFULNESS. ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH GIVE PRAISE TO THE GREATNESS OF GOD, FOR "THROUGH THE LORD IS HIGH, HE REGARDS THE LOWLY", AND BRINGS DELIVERANCE TO THOSE IN TROUBLE. THROUGH THE STEADFAST LOVE OF THE LORD, THE PSALMIST EXPRESSES CONFIDENCE THAT "THE LORD WILL

FULFILL HIS PURPOSE FOR ME.” I HEAR AN ECHO OF THE 23RD PSALM.

TODAY’S GOSPEL READING RECORDS THE PIVOTAL EVENT AT CAESAREA PHILLIPI WHEN PETER PROCLAIMS THAT JESUS IS INDEED THE MESSIAH. THE OTHER GOSPELS ALSO INCLUDE THE CONFESSION OF THE IDENTITY OF JESUS; HOWEVER MATTHEW’S VERSION IS DISTINCTIVE, IN THAT IT SEEMS TO ME THAT CHRIST IS HERE TRYING TO KNOW WHAT HIS DISCIPLES THINK OF HIM AND WHAT OTHERS ARE ALSO THINKING – HOW DOES HE COME ACROSS? AND WHAT ABOUT THE CHURCH IN THE FUTURE.

HE INQUIRES WHAT THE OPINIONS OF OTHERS WERE CONCERNING HIM; *WHO DO MEN SAY THAT I, THE SON OF MAN, AM?*

THEIR RESPONSE INCLUDES JOHN THE BAPTIST, ELIJAH, JEREMIAH, OR ONE OF THE OTHER PROPHETS. JESUS CONTINUES TO PRESS THE ISSUE BY ASKING, “BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

PETER, ALWAYS THE FIRST TO JUMP INTO A QUESTION, DECLARES THAT JESUS IS “THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF THE

LIVING GOD.” THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT ONE OF THE DISCIPLES HAS USED THE TITLE, ALTHOUGH IT HAS BEEN REFERRED TO BEFORE IN MATTHEW’S GOSPEL CHAPTER 1 AND 11. IN COMPARISON TO THE OTHER GOSPEL ACCOUNTS, ONLY MATTHEW ADDS THE PHRASE “SON OF THE LIVING GOD” PLACING THE ROLE OF THE MESSIAH WITHIN THE REIGN OF GOD AND APART FROM ANY NATIONALISTIC OR MILITARY CONNOTATIONS.

VERSES 17-19 ARE ALSO UNIQUE TO MATTHEWS’ AND MAKE A CONNECTION BETWEEN PETER’S CONFESSION AND THE CHURCH. JESUS PRONOUNCES A BLESSING ON PETER – HE IS THE ONLY DISCIPLE TO RECEIVE A SPECIFIC BLESSING FROM JESUS.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PETER IS FURTHER VERIFIED, AS JESUS GOES ON TO SAY THAT “YOU ARE PETER AND ON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH...” ALTHOUGH JESUS HAS ALREADY GIVEN TO SIMON THE NAME OF PETER, THERE IS A PLAY ON WORDS HERE THAT IS POSSIBLE IN ARAMAIC AS WELL AS GREEK. THE NAME “PETROS” IS SIMILAR TO THE GREEK *PETRA*, WHICH MEANS BOULDER OR

ROCK. THE NAME MAY INDICATE THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH THE CHURCH CAN BE BUILT, OR IT MAY REFER TO THE CHARACTER OF PETER HIMSELF.

HERE AND IN MATTHEW, CHAPTER 18, V 15,17 AND 21 ARE THE ONLY PLACES IN WHICH THE WORD CHURCH APPEARS IN THE GOSPELS. THIS MAY HAVE BEEN A WAY FOR MATTHEW TO DISTINGUISH THE COMMUNITY THAT JESUS BRINGS INTO BEING FROM THE JEWISH SYNAGOGUE. THIS COMMUNITY OF FAITH IS SO GROUNDED IN CHRIST AND HIS TEACHINGS THAT EVEN "THE GATES OF HADES WILL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT." JESUS, IN CONFERRING HIS PERSONAL AUTHORITY ON PETER, ASSURES HIM AND THE CHURCH THAT DEATH'S POWER WILL NOT PREVAIL.

PETER AND THE CHURCH AS A WHOLE ARE GIVEN A FURTHER CHARGE. "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." THIS SEEMS TO BE UNDERSTOOD AS TO JEWISH CUSTOM WAS TO BIND SOMEONE TO THEIR OATH OR NOT "LOOSE".

IN MATTHEW 18:18 THIS POWER IS GIVEN TO THE COMMUNITY. THE POINT HERE IS THAT AN EARTHLY AUTHORITY IS ESTABLISHED TO INFORM THE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD'S GUIDANCE. THE PASSAGE ENDS WITH JESUS STERNLY WARNING THE DISCIPLES "NOT TO TELL ANYONE THAT HE AS THE MESSIAH". THEY MUST LEARN WHAT THE MESSIAHSHIP IS BEFORE THEY CAN TELL OTHERS, ON TOP OF IT BEING SO DANGEROUS.

IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS, PAUL APPEALS TO HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO OFFER THEMSELVES TO GOD AS A LIVING SACRIFICE. THEY ARE NO LONGER TO FOLLOW THE WAYS OF THE WORLD, BUT TO BE TRANSFORMED SO THAT THEY MAY DISCERN THE WILL OF GOD FOR THEM.

ALL HAVE BEEN GIVEN DIFFERING GIFTS THROUGH GOD'S GRACE, TO BE USED FOR THE WEFARE OF THE ENTIRE BODY OF CHRIST. THUS WE ARE A BODY THAT PRESENTS ITSELF TO GOD – A COMMUNITY IN WHICH ALL ARE NEEDED FOR WHOLENESS AND HOLINESS.

I WILL CLOSE WITH THIS PASSAGE FROM ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYALA –

“THE MOST WONDERFUL THING IS UNITY WITH JESUS AND WITH THE FATHER. IN JESUS WE SHALL PARTAKE IN GOD IF WE FIRMLY RESIST AND FLEE ALL THE ARROGANT ATTACKS OF THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD. UNITY OF PRAYER, UNITY OF SUPPLICATION, UNITY OF MIND, AND UNITY OF EXPECTANCY IN LOVE AND IN BLAMELESS JOY: THIS IS JESUS CHRIST AND THERE IS NOTHING GREATER THAN HE. FLOCK TOGETHER, ALL OF YOU, AS TO ONE TEMPLE OF GOD, AS TO ONE ALTAR, TO ONE JESUS CHRIST, WHO PROCEEDED FROM THE ONE FATHER, WHO IS IN THE ONE AND RETURNED TO THE ONE.”

AMEN