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**Title:** Jesus Said What!?! When Jesus Said Who Am I?

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**Text:** [Matthew 16:13-20](#)

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I remember when my children were first learning how to drive. Giving them the keys to the old Toyota we'd purchased from their grandparents, and hugging them goodbye as they drove off to high school.

Not only were they in control of a vehicle capable of driving over

100 miles an hour (holy smoke!) but Randy and I were expecting them to drive at least 55 or 60 miles per hour (probably more like 65 or 70, truth be told) on I-465 in heavy 7:30am traffic as they made their way to Lawrence Central High School. Looking back on it, were we crazy?

The stakes were pretty high.

- Were they awake enough to focus ~ in all sorts of weather?
- Were they skilled enough to manage around other harebrained drivers and huge semi-trucks?
- Did they really have the maturity to handle that kind of responsibility?
- What if they messed up?
- What if they made the wrong snap decision?
- What would it cost, not in monetary terms, but in terms much more precious than that?
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Were we crazy? Perhaps so...just a little.

Just as Jesus was ... it seems to me ...just a little crazy.

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

*He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"*

*Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

*And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! ... And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, ... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, ... Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell no one that he was the Messiah. (Matthew 16:13-20)*

Simon bar Jonah. Jesus hands him the keys to the kingdom. Really? Hmmmm.

Simon bar Jonah. Look at his track record prior to and after this conversation with Jesus. Can we claim that he has the maturity of even a 16 year old? He is constantly missing the point and often talks and acts before he thinks. A few verses following this passage, Jesus actually calls him "*Satan*" for setting his mind on human instead of divine things! Then later, HE is the disciple who denies Jesus 3 times. How is it that Jesus gives the keys to the kingdom of heaven and says he will build the church, on the shoulders of the likes of this guy?!

Of course many of you know, and scholars point out, that the church was not built on the cornerstone of Peter's actions, but rather it was modeled after his testimony – his understanding of and **FAITH IN** Jesus Christ ~ his **faith** which was perceptive, ironic and solid as a rock.

When asked, "*Who do you say that I am?*" Simon Peter answered Jesus, "*You are the Messiah;*" you are the anointed one. For Jews, the act of anointing something or someone was a way of setting it apart, preserving it for God's purposes. "*Jesus,*" Peter was saying, "*you are the anointed one, the One we have been waiting for, the one set apart to rule and lead as God's instrument, God's servant.*" Peter was just that good. He was just that perceptive.

And then he said, "*Jesus, you are **the** son of the **living** God.*" Now we of this 21<sup>st</sup> century need to understand a little more precisely what Simon was saying back here in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. "Son of God" was a royal title in the Roman world. To be a "Son of David" was important in the Jewish context, but to be a son of a god would have been a reference to Augustus Caesar, Emperor Caesar, who was the adopted son of Julius Caesar a man who had also hinted at his own divine status during his lifetime. Both of these men were deified as "sons of a god" by the Roman senate upon their deaths.

So for Simon to say that Jesus was **the** son (not just **a** son) of the **living** God, (not just A god up there in the heavens somewhere but

the **living** God who is here and now and amongst us all) was a powerful faith statement, and something of a rebuke to the claims of the Roman emperor. "Jesus, you are the Son of the Living God!" Peter's irony of this claim should not be missed.

And Jesus' response to Simon? Ah well ~

*"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven..."*

"Peter," which in Greek, "*petra*," means "rock."

Simon Peter. Jesus hands him the keys to the kingdom of heaven for his demonstrative faith. Oh sure, Peter was human, just like you and me. But that's just the point. From its inception, the church was built and is sustained by human beings ~ fallible faithful human beings.

And from the church, with the keys to the kingdom, we are to teach and preach, we are to love our neighbors. We are to be a people of compassion, and hospitality. We are to bear witness ~ even to the ends of the earth!

This past week we finished up the 7 weeks of Critical Conversations about race here at Geist Christian Church. Many of you were a part of one of the three weekly Conversations as we discussed the book *Anxious to Talk About It* by Rev. Dr. Carolyn Helsel.

At least in my group on Tuesday evenings, it was not always a comfortable conversation. We did not always agree with one another. Furthermore, as we defined and discussed white privilege, the mirror of discovery was held up to each one of us in challenging ways.

And I kept thinking to myself...where better than the church to have this critical conversation? Where better than the church, born in the days of Simon Peter, to face our inequities and sins, to look at how we can better ourselves, even when we are not in agreement with one another. Our faith, our love, our understanding of God is just that big...to handle and embrace differences in the name of love. Right?

Our denominational Identity Statement becomes so clear: *The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a Movement for Wholeness in a Fragmented World. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us.*

Furthermore, our Vision Statement comes to the fore: To be a faithful, growing church that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice.

In this partisan and divided world ~ to seek such wholeness, to seek and demonstrate true community and pursue a passion for justice ~ it's why we have the keys to the kingdom...

I close with a reading of the Preamble of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Listen in these words for our call by Christ. Jesus said What?!?

### **PREAMBLE to OUR CONSTITUTION**

*As members of the Christian Church, (Disciples of Christ)  
We confess that Jesus is the Christ,  
the Son of the living God,  
and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.*



*In Christ's name and by his grace  
we accept our mission of witness  
and service to all people.*



*We rejoice in God,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
and in God's covenant of love  
which binds us to God and to one another.*



*Through baptism into Christ  
we enter into newness of life  
and are made one with the whole people of God.*



*In the communion of the Holy Spirit  
we are joined together in discipleship  
and in obedience to Christ.*



*At the Table of the Lord  
we celebrate with thanksgiving  
the saving acts and presence of Christ.*



*Within the universal church  
we receive the gift of ministry  
and the light of scripture.*

*In the bonds of Christian faith  
we yield ourselves to God  
that we may serve the One  
whose kingdom has no end.*



*Blessing, glory, and honor  
be to God forever. Amen.*



We have the keys to the kingdom. How and where and when shall we use them to bear witness to the Living God through our faith in Jesus Christ?

