



Declare the Messiah

Matthew 16:13–20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples,

“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

*They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah;
and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”*

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered,

“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

August 24, 2014

Thought For The Week

Scriptures:

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7 • Romans 11: 13-15, 29-32 • Matthew 15:21-28

What is it that people treasure most in life? Being a reasonable and religious person, I first thought, “Well, obviously, it must be the hope for eternal life.” Then, I thought, perhaps some people are not much concerned with spiritual matters, what about life in this world here and now? Then it occurred to me! There is not a soul in this world who does not want a piece of land of his own, a piece of soil to be called his own, something that will give him the assurance of safety, security and a future for his family and his nation. People for centuries have fought battles over land and its possession. Along with that goes the assumption that some folks deserve to have land and others do not: the rich and the powerful have it, the disenfranchised will have to fight for it. Once land is acquired, of course, the next step is to guard it with some force, fence it in, and wall it up so no one else can have access to it. All this can and does happen from the level of nations down to the family that owns a house in a gated community where one must sign in before entering. It’s all about the haves and the have not’s.

We have evidence of such human longing for protected land in biblical history. In the centuries since they had become a nation and captured parcels of land from other people, they had considered themselves God’s chosen people, different and set apart from all other people and nations. Given that unique assumption regarding their place in God’s plan, a tendency arose to erect walls around themselves, virtual and real, as though to protect the “chosen people” from the rest of humankind. Thus the clean were protected from the unclean, the pure from impure, the good from those considered evil, and the saved from those outside the “walls” of God’s saving power. Witness, for instance, in our own time, 2014, the wall being built by Israel to separate Israelis from Palestinians. It is called a “protective barrier”

A different and interesting assumption, however, comes from Isaiah the prophet, an Israelite himself. Speaking to his own people, He envisions foreigners as full time participants in Jewish life and worship. There are to be no walls in Isaiah’s vision, only a house of prayer for all people; a great vision still far from fulfillment. Moreover, it speaks loudly that one group of people, out of fear, has chosen to build a cement wall to separate itself from another, smaller nation. Shameful that this is allowed to happen among intelligent people in our “enlightened” age

The gospel provides another interesting insight on human prejudice. A Canaanite woman comes before Jesus, kneels and pleads for a cure for her daughter who is in ill health. Canaanite people, of course, had been considered “outlaws,” “half-breed” Jews for having intermarried with foreigner’s centuries before. Jews would have regarded the woman as undeserving of God’s care and Jesus’ attention. A woman, a supposed sinner, a non-Jew, probably thought of herself as someone walled out by years of prejudice, resentment and suspicion. At first, Jesus himself had second thoughts about healing this foreigner. In this instance, however, persistence won out. The woman considered herself worthy of God’s healing power. Jesus healed her daughter because of the mother’s insistence that she too, despite her Canaanite background, deserved God’s attention.

Fortunately, many walls have disappeared from numerous countries on this planet over the years: the Great Wall of China, the Iron Curtain, and the Berlin Wall. Some still stand only as tourist attractions. Sadly, however, walls of prejudice still exist all around us. Nations and peoples insist on their own identity and their own land. The Israeli wall still exists, in the year 2014,

as does the wall in the Southwest between Mexico and the United States. The question, of course, is this: can cement walls ever help us understand how to respect each other despite our cultural, religious or national differences? Can they bring us peace?

Ultimately, of course, walls are of human construction; walls speak of attitudes, feelings toward others. It would be the great hope of all people, of course, if we could simply consider ourselves human, God's creatures and set aside our cultural, ethnic and religious prejudices. Just think of the money that would be saved! Surely our world, God's world, would be a better place for all. Finally, it is time to build bridges not walls. Walls generate distrust; bridges make us one because we truly are one in the creative mind of God.

Happy Birthday Pat (8/30)

Prayer for Peace

God of all nations and all peoples, by whatever name you are known, we come before you with praise and thanksgiving.

Forgive our sins of selfishness and pride, we humbly ask. We would also ask for your guidance as we try to live by your standards of peace.

Guide us into the joy of being, and the desire for joyful peace for all peoples. We pray particularly for the people of Palau this day. Bless all who work for just and peaceful communities in all nations.

We uphold for your blessing those who are oppressed by the horrible injustice of slavery. Guide all who work to abolish slavery and give us an awareness of how we can support the actions of those who work for justice and freedom for all peoples. May all people know their incredible worth as your precious children.

Hear our collective prayers, O God of Peace, that your peace may become the peace of this world. Amen.

Stewardship Thought For The Week

A young man was driving home from work and saw an older, poor man on the side of the road. He offered the poor man his lunch, and also offered to take him several miles to a truck stop where he could get a ride.

While driving him to the truck stop, the young man suggested that it was getting close to dinnertime, and invited the older traveler home for dinner. During the meal, the younger man and his family enjoyed conversation with the older man, and learned that he was an itinerant farmer on his way west to help with a walnut harvest.

As it was getting late, the couple suggested that the traveler should stay for the night. They gave up their room, complete with attached bath, for the night. When the traveler protested, the couple pointed out that the young children would awaken during the night, and it would be better if the couple slept on the couch so the older man would not be disturbed.

After dinner, the wife washed the man's clothes while he enjoyed sitting on the porch with a cool drink. Early the next morning, the wife prepared a hearty breakfast and packaged a good portion of food for him, and her husband drove him to the truck stop to help him find a ride.

Before parting, the young man offered the poor man all the money in his wallet, which was less than \$20.00. The traveler refused the money with the words, "You have given me more than anyone has ever given me in this life. You have given me my dignity as a human being."