

ROCK!

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered him, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Matthew 16:13-20

“Rock”

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, August 26-27, 2017

All Services

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Matthew 16:13-20

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

What will come as no surprise to many of you, I **Really** Like going to Walt Disney World in Florida. I don't know why. I really have no rational explanation. I simply very much enjoy going to all four of the Parks there.

With my recent health issues, I *often* would think about Walt Disney World while receiving treatments or undergoing procedures. As example, when I had my bone marrow biopsy, while I lay on the metal table, I willed myself to be at Epcot, my favorite of the four parks: I imagined myself parking; walking up along the monorail through security; going through the entrance gates and using my Magic Band to get in. I could see the big “golf ball” as I passed Spaceship Earth. I felt the spray from the fountain that's there next to Mouse Gear, the merchandise store. I made it all the way down the promenade toward the lake by the time Dr. Al was finished with the procedure.

Willing myself to be mentally at Walt Disney World was how I endured, survived, even, having a *Very Large Needle* bore into my pelvis, as well as while I was recovering from cardiac adventures, or when I was receiving chemo treatments.

If you want to know about Walt Disney World, or Walt Disney the man himself, or even some of the history behind the building of Disneyland and Walt Disney World, I will gladly and willingly share what I know, quite probably to the point that you'll begin to wish you hadn't asked. I have read books on those subjects; I've gone on several “behind the scenes” tours; I listen to at least three podcasts a week about Walt Disney World and Disney in general. I have two magnets on my car: one for Nawakwa, and one for Disney. If you ever see my car's license plate, although it's subtle, you can hopefully figure out that I'm a fan: **1971 WDW** (1971 is the year Walt Disney World opened).

Walt Disney World has been something for me to hold on to. It has been like a rock. And like so many things in our lives, when something is important to us, when something means a great deal to us, we want to tell others about it.

Which then brings to my mind: Why am I willing to talk about Walt Disney World with my oncologist; why am I willing to let complete *strangers* know of my love, my enjoyment, of Walt Disney World, *Yet*, I am often hesitant, especially when not wearing my “uniform”

(that is, a clergy shirt), to tell others about my love of God? Why am I hesitant to talk about the graciousness of Christ?

What does it mean, then, to be **a rock**?

This world in which we live is changing all the time. The first century was full of change as well, only of a different nature. For those living in Palestine, they had to deal with both Greek and Roman culture breaking into their everyday living. They had to deal with both the religious *and* secular communities telling them what to eat, where to pray, how to pray, how to dress, with whom they could and could not hang out. Then Jesus comes along and tells this faith community that so much of what they know, so much of what they have been taught, can be forgotten, ignored, tossed out the window. And because they are being pulled in so many different directions, Jesus' followers needed something solid to hold on to.

I have heard people talk about someone who was a "rock" to them during some tragedy. Or even throughout life's journey in general. Jesus calls Peter "rock" (There's some fun word play going on in the Greek at that point in scripture, but it kind of loses something when it's explained, so you're just going to have to go learn new Testament Greek to get the puns). Jesus did not mean that Peter was literally granite, or stone. Rather, I think that Jesus recognized the depth and sincerity of Peter's faith. Jesus meant that Peter was one who was solid in his faith, in his belief, in his understanding, not only of God, but of life. Jesus was proclaiming Peter's faith to the other disciples.

One of the things we need to remember about Peter, though: he wasn't *always* that solid in his belief. Remember what we heard just a few weeks ago with Pastor Jen's sermon about that incident on the water? Peter was all *gung ho* to hop out of the boat, when he saw Jesus walking on the water, but once he himself was actually walking on the water, when he took his eyes off Jesus, and what happens? Into the water Peter goes.

Do you remember the story of that Thursday night/Friday morning, outside of the High Priest's palace? Peter's sitting there in the courtyard, and those around him start pointing and saying,

You te a Galalian, aren t you? You te one of those followers of Jesus.

To which Peter is all like

Ah, no, I don t know what you te talking about, I don t know that guy

Yet just **hours** before that, in the upper room with the other disciples, celebrating the Passover, Peter was vehement in his statement:

*On, no, Jesus I will **never** deny you!*

Or what about in the book of Acts, Peter has a vision telling him that **all** food was acceptable to eat, and so by extension, it is absolutely okay to sit down and eat with anyone, not just other Jewish believers. And then, just a few chapters later, Peter refuses to eat with some believers because they were eating those formerly unallowed food, and were themselves not circumcised?

Peter messed up. Several times. Kind of major big time, at least once.

Have you ever messed up in your faith journey? I know I have.

So, what does it mean to be a rock? Does it mean that our faith is unwavering? Does it mean that our faith is supposed to be unmoving? Does it mean our faith never changes? If that's what it means, can **ANY** of us be a rock?

I was asked by a friend who recently went to Walt Disney World for the very first time (he's fifty years old, I don't know what's wrong with him), he asked me

Why do you like to keep going back? Do they have new things?

To which I had to answer:

*I don't really understand **myself** why I enjoy going to Walt Disney World so much;*
and

Yes, Walt Disney World is almost constantly adding, changing.

Walt Disney's vision for the parks was that they would *never* be finished, but *always* growing.

That is what I believe faith is about as well: Changing, Growing. We often think of rocks as these Great, Immovable, Objects. But here's a thing: rocks change. Boulders get broken apart: we call that *gravel*. Gravel gets broken down: we call that *dirt*. Dirt becomes *soil*, and soil gets compressed together. Over time, with enough pressure, that soil becomes rock again.

All of us here today, hopefully, have faith. Each of us can have strong, solid, deep faith. A faith that is alive, growing, changing being built up, and being torn down.

To all of us who confess as Peter did:

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"

- to us, God says

on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

And by that I believe Jesus means that upon that rock, and that rock, and that rock, and upon each and every one of the rocks sitting here *right now*, God builds the Church. And when all these rocks come together and stand together and work together, we form a firm foundation of faith, and together we can proclaim God's strength and grace and forgiveness throughout - not just Walt Disney World - but throughout the *Entire* World.

Amen

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