

All Saints Episcopal Church Steenrijk

Chapel of the Resurrection

Corner of Leidenstraat at

Heelsumstraat

Willemstad, Curacao

The Thirteenth Sunday after

Pentecost: Proper 16A

August 23, 2026

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“Rock?”

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel according to

Matthew 16:13-20, [21-23]

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! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you

are Peter [Greek, petros], and on this rock [Greek, petra] 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, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. [From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and

scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”]

Heavenly Father, may we continue to establish our church on the rock of Jesus as our Messiah. Amen.

Poor Peter. In one short paragraph he is blessed and then cursed. The last three verses in the Gospel according to Matthew were omitted in the Revised Common Lectionary just as they had been in previous lectionaries, apparently to gain consensus with the various denominations making that lectionary determination. Possibly the Roman Church which insists its church is founded upon or around the Apostle Peter would not agree to continue the reading those three additional verses, I don't know for sure, verses which vilify

Peter in no uncertain terms. But in all fairness, we as Episcopalians and Anglicans are rooted in the Catholic tradition, though we are no longer associated with the Church of Rome. Such are the divisions that Satan has managed to carry out in our time and in earlier history. We Christians continue to be split asunder by various eccentricities and histories of our denominations. This Roman Catholic publication called the National Catholic Register published a large article about John Wall and John Kemble, two Roman

Catholic priests that had been martyred in England in 1669 during the reign of Charles II, who was both married as a Roman Catholic and who was converted to Roman Catholicism on his deathbed.

<http://www.ncregister.com/blog/stephaniemann/two-popish-plot-martyrs-on-august-22-in-1679>

And during the Roman Catholic reign of Queen Mary I, who ruled in England from 1553 to 1558, numerous protestants were murdered as well. So the extreme excesses on both sides of catholicism are

none to be proud of. Even within Anglicanism, three low church bishops were martyred in Oxford in during the bloody reign of Mary I by the so called high church Anglicans and Roman Catholics for their role in bringing the translations of the Eucharist and the Bible to the people in English. An impressive tall marble statue marking where this dastardly act of burning these men at the stake occurred over 350 years ago can still be seen today in the middle of one of the most traveled streets of Oxford, England, at the intersection of

St. Giles, Magdalen Street and Beaumont Street. That the church has survived these incredibly horrendous excesses is a miracle to behold.

How can one rationalize the marked challenges of faith that the church has faced and still faces?

One avenue of thought is to look at the most original copy of this New Testament dialogue of Jesus with his disciples. It is in Greek where the subtlety is perhaps more obvious. Jesus tells his disciples that his church will be based on the rock of Peter's confession,

not on Peter himself. But through the centuries, the Roman church has acquired the trappings of being the church of Peter rather easily since the Vatican's basilica is perched atop the ancient burial tomb of Peter. However, is it Peter we are worshipping, or Jesus? If the Vatican is suddenly vaporized, is Christianity dead? Surely not. And is it Peter whom Christ was saying he was building his church upon, or was it instead the statement of Peter that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the focal point of what Jesus was founding his

church upon? In the Greek original it is apparent that Jesus is not saying he is building his church upon Peter the person, regardless of the physical location of the basilica of Rome and whether it continues as a physical place or not. Peter's ministry was by and large far from Rome, although how he may have finally made it there for his martyrdom is shrouded in mystery. It is the Apostle Paul whose journey to Rome is told in minute detail in the book of Acts that we assume the journey of Peter might be based upon. The Bible does

not actually record either man's martyrdom, but it is pretty certain that both men met their ends in the City of Rome at the hands of a pagan Roman Emperor, probably Nero, in around 64 to 68 AD, about 37 to 41 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Now back to the petra, the rock, of Jesus as Messiah. What does this mean? Messiah, or Christ, means the 'anointed one', the one anointed by God as the redeemer of the world. Of course many non-believers do not believe in any thing or any one as a redeemer. From what are

we being redeemed? The standard answer is from our own sins. A sinless God will not accept a sinful person into heaven, that is unless, unless, someone of God's stature vouches for them. We Christians believe that Jesus, the Risen Lord, will vouch for us who believe in him and in his saving grace. However, no one can tell what is in another's heart; we may try to infer what is in someone else's heart, but only God really knows, so we are admonished by Jesus not to judge, as only God can judge; but we do say we will appear before the great

judgment seat of Christ at our deaths, not Peter's judgment seat, even though our humor often places Saint Peter at the entrance of heaven. That idea comes from Jesus saying he will give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that whatever he binds on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever he looses on earth will be loosed in heaven. But what does loosing and binding mean? We usually take those words to be forgiveness of sins, but can Peter or anyone but Christ release us from our sins? No one can actually remove sin

from us, not Peter nor any saint nor any good works; nothing can erase our past, nothing. So, at our death we come before God, before the great judgment seat of Christ, with our sins still clinging to us like glue. We cannot wash them off in baptism or in the Eucharist or at the unction at our death; nothing can ‘wash us clean’ even though some of the traditional old Christians songs imply that the water of baptism washes us clean. Not so—baptism and the chrism that follows simply marks us as Christ’s own forever, but only Christ can see our

mark—we have an invisible mark that only Christ can see. So we are intimately and ultimately dependent on Christ for our salvation.

So, what does Peter loose or not loose? Two chapters later in this Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus gives the same authority to “the disciples”. And they seem to be separate from Peter who then approaches Jesus to ask how many times is he supposed to forgive someone. Then Jesus gives him an arithmatic test: forgive seven times seventy. Jesus commands Peter to forgive, period,

period. And that is where we have gotten this tradition of a priest pronouncing absolution upon us at each Eucharist. The church has given its authority to its bishops and priests to absolve us, to announce Christ's absolution of us. But inherent in this absolution is that we do not go back and recommit that sin from which we have been absolved. Have we always loved our neighbor as we love ourselves? Yes or no? Have we always loved God with all our heart, mind, and spirit? Yes or no? It seems nearly impossible to me

that any absolution can absolve us of breaking those two commandments which we all break over and over again. Yet, we give the general absolution at every Eucharist. So how much will God acknowledge something which contradicts his law of love of neighbor and of God? Does God not forgive those infractions which we probably do daily?

The protestant answer is that by the grace of God we are forgiven. The catholic tradition says the Eucharist gives us absolution, along with the priest or bishop. But, actually, only God can

give us ultimate absolution. So we are bound and loosed by how much we bind ourselves to Christ or how we have loosed ourselves from Christ's reign over us. It's that simple.

In the end, however, we come before the great judgment seat of Christ 'without one plea' as one old hymn says. We have nothing to stand on but the mercy of Christ. Only as Christ protects us from the awesome holiness of his heavenly Father do we have any hope of salvation at our last day. So, it behooves us to live a life of love that transforms

our community, our country, and our world. When we begin to love unconditionally, when we begin to forgive unconditionally, when we love God unconditionally, then we may have hope at the end. This depends on us, and we depend entirely on Christ. Amen.

“Rock?”

Proper 16A

August 23, 2026

Matthew 16:13-20, [21-23]

Description:

The forgiveness of sins is ultimately in God’s hands. Christians put their hope in Jesus Christ as their savior at their last day. We cannot earn our place in heaven. Only as we follow Christ’s commandments of love of neighbor and God can we hope to come before the great judgment seat of Christ with any

expectation of ultimate salvation, by the grace of Christ. It is as simple as that.

Tags:

Christians, Christ, Jesus, messiah, sins, salvation, love, judgment, Protestant, Catholic, forgiveness, absolution, Eucharist, martyrs, Queen Mary I, King Charles II, England, Nero, love, neighbor, God, Peter, keys, Rome, Vatican, Paul, grace, rock, Hades, kingdom, heaven, baptism, Roman, priest, bishop

St. John's Episcopal Church

61 Broad Street

Elizabeth, New Jersey 07201

Proper 16A

August 27, 2011

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

“Hidden Identity?”

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel according to

Matthew 16:13-20

May we always hold you with love in our hearts, Dear Lord, as you always hold us in your heart of love. Amen.

How would you explain your faith to someone who was not a Christian, someone who was a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim or a Jew, the lesser ascribed religions of many in other parts of the world and of some in the United States? Do you have any idea of what other world religions teach? World Religions is now the topic of a required course of all Episcopal seminarians at General

Theological Seminary, the oldest Episcopal seminary in the United States. The best reason for this course is that it is in the context of other world religions that we can gain some new insight into our own religion and understand why the adherents of other religions are different from us in their ethics and behavior. So let us briefly describe the various most well known world religions. But first let us review how we describe our own religion here in the Episcopal Church which represents for us the same view of Christianity as in all the other Trinitarian

Christian churches worldwide, those who believe that God is known in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as specified in the Nicene and Apostles Creeds. Christianity is characterized by the writings about Jesus Christ in the Gospels dating to the first century AD, but Christianity also always includes as well as all the writings of the Old Testament, including the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. The other great world religions also have specific historic founders who lived in specific places and at specific times. We

have heard of Buddha, whose “real” name was Siddhartha Gautama who lived between about 563 BC and 483 BC. The writings ascribed to and about Buddah are called the Tripit-aka or the Pali Canon. The Hindu founder, Krisha, lived around the first millennium BC, and the writings which Krisha is said to have written around one thousand BC are called record of the Battle of Bharta or the Mahabharata, written by Krishna before and during and after that battle he was a leader in. And you also may now know that the Quran is the writings of

Muhammad in the seventh century AD. And if you are an orthodox Jew, you would favor the writings of Moses, the Torah, dating perhaps from a similar time when the Psalms were written down around the first millennium BC as well as other writings by various prophets and others dating from then to about 165 BC for the last written book of the Old Testament, the book of Daniel. However, Moses himself lived around 1400 BC.

What sets Jesus Christ apart from Krishna, Buddha, Moses, and

Muhammad? Why is Jesus so special for us Christians and for the world?

For one thing, of all these religions leaders, only Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. Muhammad died a natural death, and his followers say he ascended into heaven somewhat like the prophet Elijah.

One Jewish tradition says Moses did likewise ascend into heaven, however, the Torah record does not affirm that but instead says Moses died a natural death and was buried in a yet unknown grave overlooking the Promised Land of Israel,

and that his grave is still there; the Torah has no record of any ascension of Moses into heaven.

Krishna is presumed to have died a normal death, but he was not resurrected, and Krishna did not ascend into heaven. Likewise, Buddha also presumably died a normal death, but he was not resurrected, and Buddha also did not ascend into heaven. So, the crucifixion death and resurrection of Jesus sets him completely apart from all the other leaders of the other lesser ascribed world religions. The crucifixion and

resurrection are both specifically unique to Jesus Christ. Jesus' crucifixion and cross and resurrection are his eternal and unique identification among all world religions.

In today's gospel reading Peter affirms Jesus as being the "the Messiah, the Son of the living God." "Messiah" is also a particularly unique designation that no other religious leader of lesser ascribed world religions has. The unique designation of Jesus as the "Messiah" means Jesus is the 'anointed one', the one anointed at his baptism by the Holy

Spirit, anointed by the Spirit to designate Jesus as the Son of God—the Spirit did not “make” Jesus the Son of God, the Spirit simply pointed to Jesus as the Son of God with whom God is well pleased (as recorded in the gospel according to Mark, Chapter One, Verse Eleven).

Now that we have established the secure and distinctive identification of Christianity, our own particular religion and faith, we have a very specific promise that here in our “church, the gates of Hades will not prevail against” us. Isn’t that a comforting thought and

indeed promise from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that the gates of Hades will not ever prevail against us?

What does this mean? It means that never will evil triumph over us, that the Satan will never be able to overcome us, that no demon of any kind now or ever in the future will be able to overwhelm us. What that implies, however, is that evil will try to prevail over us, that the devil will try to overwhelm us, and that demonic forces will try to overcome us. So, we are not promised a struggle-free life, in other words. Each step we take

for good and right and justice may be opposed, but in the end, we as Christians will prevail. But since we are not eternal beings, our end will prove this firm protection of Christ. We will not have to face judgment from in front of God, but Jesus Christ will stand between us and God, protecting us from God's wrath, redeeming us sinners in God's sight, and placing the Lord's mighty protection always around us.

If you are like me, I would like that protection to prevent my death or injury or disease, but the fallen and temporary

creation all around us will eventually see to it that I and all of us here will one day die from injury or from disease or from the ravages of old age. But spiritually we all who place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, our Messiah, will overcome all that, and we will be with Christ in the heavenly realms at our end.

I have been in many struggles trying to keep the environment in and around Elizabeth, New Jersey, safe and healthy, but the effort is always being made by some of those in power to try to destroy our city and its surrounds by various and

sundry means. One effort was to pave our streets and highways with lead and other heavy metal containing asphalt from various New Jersey waste incinerators. At the same time, the same effort was being made in the state of New York on Long Island in the town of Setauket. On Long Island, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation approved a scheme to pave the parking lot of the Ward Melville High School in Setauket; it was slyly and surreptitiously done as a project connected to the Westinghouse Science

Talent Search (now named the “Intel Science Talent Search”) which had promised college scholarships to the winning team and individuals in a science competition; unfortunately, a scientist at the New York State University at Stony Brook convinced an unsuspecting high school chemistry teacher at Ward Melville High School to recruit two students to “oversee” this paving “experiment” using heavy metal ash, thinking no one would notice; however, I was able to learn of this dastardly plan and was able to get it

publicized in the Long Island Newsday newspaper. It was in reading this news article in Newsday that the principal of the school learned of this experiment in paving that had already been done on his high school's parking lot and stopped any further "experimentation" of this sort in that school. The news article (at <
<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/01/28/nyregion/long-island-dominates-science-contest.html?pagewanted=1?pagewanted=1>
>)

which only tells a minimal part of the full story notes that the student had somehow raised \$125,000 for this paving project, quite an extremely suspiciously large amount for anyone to raise, much less a high school student—indeed, he had the secret funds of the waste incinerator lobby paying for this with the student being the ‘fall guy’; but the incinerator lobby possibly did insure that the student got to be a finalist for this scholarship—the pro-incinerator lobby is very well connected but very questionably financed. Should not any

school be suspicious of one of its students raising one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars?! Indeed, as is said, “money talks”, but truth and justice talk louder.

Here in Elizabeth, New Jersey, I learned that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection approved a similar heavy metal ash paving project here on Center Drive (now called “IKEA Drive”) beside Babies R Us and IKEA near the New Jersey Turnpike off Exit 13A and North Avenue. For that project which was done at 10 PM in the stealth

of night I was able to get the Newark Star Ledger to come out and take pictures of all the paving, and television NBC Channel 4 “Live at Five” news carried the story as well. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection quickly rescinded the plan to study such paving elsewhere in the State of New Jersey. However, to this day, we all have to live with this dangerously paved road when we drive to either IKEA or Babys R Us off the New Jersey Turnpike and North Avenue, and the students at the Setauket High School will

have to live with a school parking lot containing dangerously high levels of lead and other heavy metals. Eventually both pavements will crumble and release heavy metals into the air. We have been able to stop further paving of anything on the East Coast, but so far we have not prevailed in getting either of these paving jobs undone, yet we are still trying, knowing that one day we will indeed prevail against these forces of evil, and also knowing the devil will still be trying to find a way around eco-justice and safety.

So, when you think all the odds are against you, think again on Jesus' words that "the gates of Hades will not prevail against" you. Thank God for giving us God's wonderfully powerful and overcoming Son.

Amen.

Proper 16A

August 23, 2026

“Rock?”

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