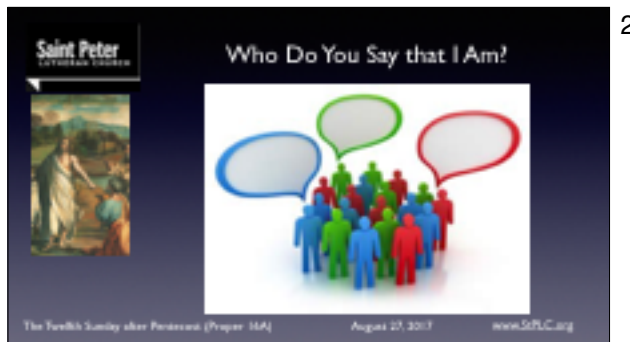




I don't know how many of you are like me, but I love reading about polls. It was fascinating a year ago to follow the presidential election polls — almost all of which turned out to be wrong. I am often intrigued by polls that detail what people are thinking about faith and social issues and lifestyle choices. One of my favorite polling organizations is the Pew Research Center for Religion & Public life. They often comment on the role of faith in people's lives these days, and I am often surprised and intrigued by their results.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus creates a poll of his own. As he is traveling through Caesarea Philippi, He floats two important questions



First of all, he asks his disciples: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Here Jesus wants to find out what the popular opinion of him is. He knows that the disciples have been listening to the people. They have heard many different theories as to just who Jesus is. So he uses them as pollsters, and they come back with the following information: Some believe that he is John the Baptist, come back to life. Some believe that he is the Old Testament prophet Elijah. Some believe that he is Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.

Obviously, most people really don't know who Jesus is. Sure they respect him a great deal. Sure they have followed him, and admire him, and listen to him. But they really don't know who he is.

3

Saint Peter
LITURGICAL LECTURE

Who Do You Say that I Am?

[Jesus] 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?"
[St. Matthew 16:13-15]

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 16A) August 27, 2017 www.SPLC.org

Then Jesus turns pollster himself, and directs the same question towards the disciples: "Who do you say that I am?"

This turns the tables. Now it doesn't have to do with the gathering of public opinion. It doesn't have to do with data collected while milling among the crowds. It has to do with their personal beliefs. It has to do with how deeply they trust him, and how seriously they have committed themselves to his ministry.

4

Saint Peter
LITURGICAL LECTURE

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."
[St. Matthew 16:16-17]

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We can't know what the others were thinking, but as usual, we know what Peter does. Peter calls out: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!"

In the Gospels, this is the very first time that anyone has declared this out loud. Never before has anyone ever spoken what many must have suspected. Jesus is the one they are waiting for. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Savior, who will bring God's salvation to the world.

Jesus is impressed with this declaration, and he says so: "Blessed are you," Jesus says to Peter, "God has revealed this to you."


5

Saint Peter
EPISTOLAR LECTURE

Who Do You Say that I Am?

Rock
Aramaic — Cephas — כֶּפֶס
Greek — Petros — Πέτρος

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Then Jesus says something very interesting. He says that Peter will be the rock upon which the church will be built. It's actually a play on words, for those of you who know a bit about ancient languages. The Aramaic word for rock is cephas, and so Jesus calls Simon Cephas. In the Greek language (the language of the New Testament), the word for rock is πετρός, and so Jesus calls him Peter. The disciples no doubt get the connection.

6

Saint Peter
EPISTOLAR LECTURE

Christ's Charge to Peter
Rabbi



The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14A) August 27, 2017 www.SPLC.org

Why does Jesus do this? Quite simply, because Peter has finally stumbled upon what it means to be a follower of Jesus. After misunderstanding after misunderstanding, one of the disciples sees the light.

Peter has caught a glimpse of what Jesus has been after all along. It doesn't have to do with political victory, or military might, or crushing their enemies. It has to do with faith. The kind of faith Peter displays when he declares for all to hear that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. The kind of faith that provides a foundation for a Christ-like life. The kind of faith upon which an entire church could be built.

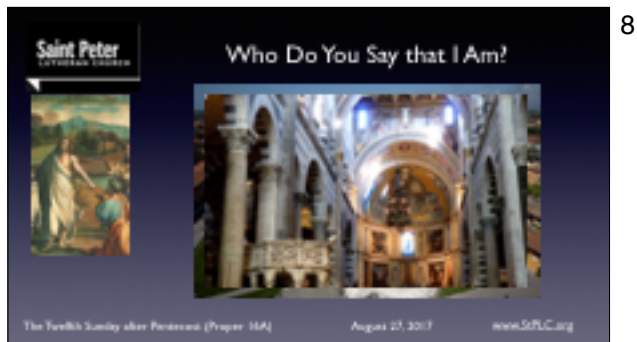
In these words from St. Peter, we find the very foundation of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. A foundation that will never fail.



We know how important a foundation is, don't we? Anyone who has ever owned a home understands that no building with a poor foundation will ever last.

When Betsy and I were shopping for our first home here in the Denver area, we found one we really liked. It was in a nice neighborhood. It had some good upgrades. The back yard was just right. It was within our price range. But something about it didn't seem quite right. As you looked back into the kitchen, the lines didn't seem to match up. Finally, I took a glass out of the cupboard, and laid it on its side in the middle of the kitchen floor. Immediately the glass rolled, on its own, to the far side of the kitchen.

We didn't buy that house! As much as we liked it, the fact that the kitchen was sinking into the back yard was enough to convince us to look elsewhere.



This is not just true for residential homes. I've long been interested in church architecture, and during my sabbatical in 2006 we had the chance to visit some well-known cathedrals. Some of them are absolutely gorgeous: Gothic and Romanesque Cathedrals that inspire the worshipper to reflect on the power and the majesty of God.

One of these great Cathedrals is in Tuscany, Italy. It is a beautiful example of Gothic architecture. An imposing structure that makes quite a statement as you approach it.

And it is filled with beautiful stained glass and sculptures.
Gorgeous!

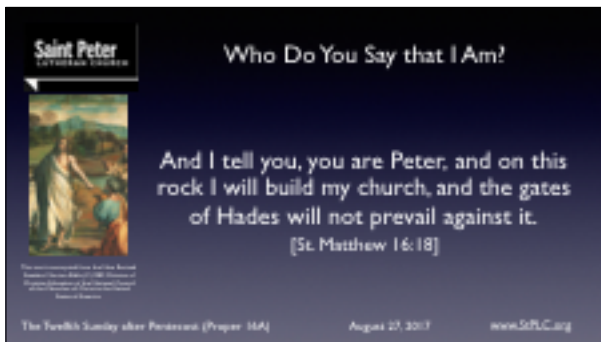
9



But is better known for its bell tower. Located in the town of Pisa, the foundation under one side of this tower began to give way even before it was finished. And had it not been shored up with reinforcements in the past century, this leaning tower of Pisa would still be tilting farther and farther over each year — coming closer and closer to total destruction with every additional degree of tilt.

Those who constructed the tower quickly became aware of the fact that without a solid foundation, a structure has no hope. If they had been more careful about its foundation, the bell tower would be standing straight and tall today, as many others still are. But because they didn't do so, their creation has become world famous, not for its beauty, but for its fault.

10



Jesus doesn't want us to have a Pisa bell tower faith — leaning and in danger of toppling over.

But a faith that is built on a rock solid foundation.

So every year about this time, we focus on our Fall Schedule and the return of Sunday School. Our hope for all of our kids is that Sunday School and Catechism and various youth and family events will help them to welcome God's presence into the center of their lives, and to trust in the promises that are ours in Christ.

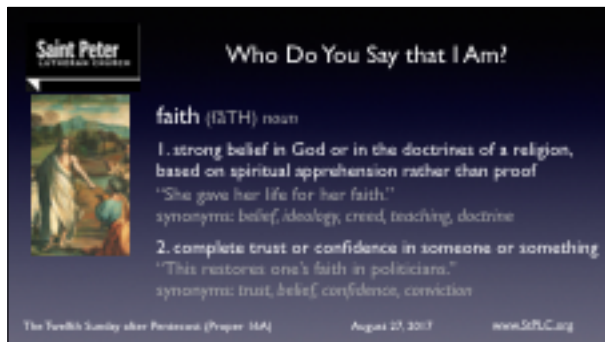
Our Sunday School staff is hard at work getting ready for this year's ministry, and looking forward to gathering with your kids on Sundays beginning in two weeks.

We want this for our adults as well. I'll be in the Narthex starting in two weeks, leading an Adult Forum on Martin Luther's Small Catechism, and the impact of the Reformation on our lives today.



This is an area of ministry we want to develop. Our Stewardship Team is planning for this Fall. We hope, again this year, to make use of a Narrative Budget. We believe that one of the stories God wants to tell through Saint Peter is the difference it makes to grow together in faith. You see the orange pie slice in the budget — it indicates that almost 18% of our time and energy goes to this narrative. We are committed to offering opportunities for our young people to experience faith formation. We are committed to this with adults as well, and we hope adult faith formation will be a focus in next year's ministry development.

Bible studies, classes, retreats, small groups... all of these can help to build a rock solid foundation of faith at the center of our lives.



Jesus calls the confession of Saint Peter the rock on which the church will be built. He is continuing to pursue the theme which has informed our Gospel lessons for three weeks now. He is calling us to a deeper and more meaningful faith. Not one that is all about getting it right, but one that helps us learn to trust him.

In a culture where we are encouraged to trust wealth or status or our own personal accomplishments, Jesus asks us to trust him, and him alone.


Here is the essence of our faith, as hard as it can be to embrace it. We won't always get it right. We'll fall, over and over again, to the temptation of trusting in other realities.

But the invitation continues to beckon us.

And Christ is in the calling.

Promising to provide the strength and courage that we need.

13



Saint Peter
CATHOLIC LITURGY

Take It Home!

Let's keep the conversation going. Our hosts will have a 7-day devotional guide for you as you leave today.


Question for this evening's conversation: "What does it mean to trust Jesus with all of our hearts, even when in the midst of trouble and difficulty?"

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As you leave today, our hosts have a 7-day devotional for you. The first question invites us to reflect on what it would mean for us to grow in our capacity to trust Jesus.

We invite you to take these devotional resources home, and spend some time reflecting on faith and faithfulness in your home this week.

14



Saint Peter
CATHOLIC LITURGY


The Last Word

Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase.
[Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.]

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I'd like to give the last word to Dr. King this morning. He once said that, "Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase." A helpful image when we think of what it means to confess, like Saint Peter, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

15




Hymn of the Day

Please stand as we sing today's Hymn of the Day.

1st Service:
My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less

2nd Service: *The Solid Rock*
(page #23)



The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10A) August 27, 2017 www.SPC.org

Please stand with us as we sing today's Hymn of the Day.

1st Service:
My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less

2nd Service: The Solid Rock
(page #23)

16



St. Matthew 16:13-20



The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10A) August 27, 2017 www.SPC.org

16:13 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, “You are the Messiah, 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.