

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 9:18-24

"The True Rock"

Not too long ago I preached about things that might appear to be one thing but are really another; about people who say they are one thing but are really another. Rumors can get started and can be very dangerous to one's reputation and integrity. Our Lord Jesus is quite well aware of what others are saying, and professing to believe. He knows what was being said about Him then, just as He does today. And so, Jesus asks the disciples to share with Him what is being said about Him. How did people come up with some of this stuff? The disciples tell Jesus that "*Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.*" If you think about it these statements are not so far off from what some people are saying today about Him; they say that "Jesus is a great teacher," "oh, Jesus was a prophet, a preacher and a healer," or how about this one that really upsets me - "Jesus is just one of many ways to heaven, but not the only way." Jesus asked His disciples this question so that they would hear the stark contrast between those statements and the truth which Peter would proclaim when Jesus asked them specifically: "*Who do YOU say that I am?*"

Luke's Gospel gives us the short answer with Peter saying simply "*the Christ of God.*" Matthew who was an eyewitness that day at Caesarea Philippi - recorded Peter as saying "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Jesus replied, "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*" Let me repeat that last part for you but using the original Greek words that I believe gives us greater insight into this conversation. Jesus said to Simon: "*I also say to you that you are Πέτρος, (Petros) and upon this πετρα (Petra) I will build My church.*" Πέτρος (Petros) means small rock or stone, as opposed to πετρα (petra) which means rock or bedrock, a large foundational stone. Can you see how this gives us a much clearer indication of what "rock" Christ would build His church upon? There is clearly a distinct difference between the two - and you cannot confuse or misinterpret the intent of Jesus meaning, in that Peter, Πέτρος, would be a solid individual, a leader, whom Jesus would eventually rely on - but he is certainly **not the foundation of the church, by any means!** We are all like the stones that go into building the church, but the foundation of Jesus' church would need to be much bigger, much deeper, more reliable, and much more solid! **The statement of faith that Peter made when he announced Jesus to be the Messiah, the "Christ, the son of the living God" would be the "rock," the foundation of truth that would be the basis, the foundation of the church - a faith that endures!** Let this NOT be misunderstood. Saying "Jesus is a great teacher," "oh, Jesus was a prophet, a preacher and a healer," or "Jesus is just one of many ways to heaven, but not the only way" or even that anyone else is "the Way, the Truth and the Life," poisons that foundation - weakening it to the point of collapse and rubble. I must confess, it is unnerving and unsettling when those statements come from within

the Christian community. It dilutes, and waters down the faith – it is deceitful and false! It is straight from the father of lies!

There comes a time when you have just had enough of these falsehoods, tired of hearing the all of the lies, a time when the truth must be told – and the faith professed – no matter what! It is time to proclaim the true identity of the church. We as the Body of Christ can continue to ignore the poisons that are flowing through, or we can stand up, trusting in Almighty God for His provision, for His blessing, and for His strength in the days to come – like Abraham, relying on our faith in Him that somehow we will make it through; somehow we will continue to proclaim **the ONE TRUE GOSPEL of Jesus Christ – undaunted, undeterred, and undiluted**. As The Apostle Paul encourages the church in Ephesians 6:13, this message is for us today as well; let us “*take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.*” Let us be confident that Jesus “*is the Christ, the Son of the Living God*” (Matthew 16:16) and let us, together, boldly, with blessed assurance, profess the faith that endures!

So Who is Jesus?

- Is Jesus the Son of God - that God the Father proclaimed on the mountain that day, on Mount Hermon during the Transfiguration - or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus the one who required repentance for sin – and then provided forgiveness – or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus the one who sacrificed Himself – on the hard wood of the cross – so that “*whoever believes in Him – shall not perish – but have eternal life?*” Or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who touched hearts and cured bodies and souls of people who have faith in Him and still does so today – or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets – or is He someone else who turns a blind eye at the Law that His Father gave to Moses?
- Is Jesus someone who believes every word that is in the Scriptures – as the written Word of God- or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who invites people to come to Him and be transformed – never to be the same again – healed of affliction, disease, addictions, perversions and sinful behavior? Or is He someone else – who says come to me and stay as you are – have fun and forget what my Father said – that was for another time?

I find it remarkable that there are people *who like to “call themselves” Christians* today who cannot – or will not attest to the fact of Jesus’ true identity; that He is who God the Father says He is. They will either say – Oh, He was a great prophet, or teacher, or even that He had great power that was used to lead us to our own divinity. One famous German theologian from the 19th Century, Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, believed that Jesus had more “God consciousness” than any other human had ever had. Others like Episcopal priest Marcus Borg claim that the story of Jesus is just metaphor, while others make the claim that Jesus is pure

mythology. OUCH! The retired Bishop of Newark, John Shelby Spong believes that the atonement – the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross – to pay the price for our sins, is "child abuse" by God the Father, and that the resurrection never happened! There is more that could be said about that and there are quite a few other things that he doesn't believe as well – like the virgin birth or that Jesus ever performed miracles! That is another sermon for another day.

I want to know how can a bishop like that stand at altar and say "*Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again*" and not be a hypocrite – when he doesn't believe a word he is saying? What drummer is he marching to? Why is he a priest? These descriptions of "unfaith" – are like finger nails scraping on a blackboard!

One thing is clear – **you either accept the Divinity of Jesus Christ as the only Son of God – who died on the cross for the atonement of our sins – OR NOT! You believe in Him – and what the Bible says about Him - OR NOT!** If you do believe in Him, then you can call yourself a follower of Christ or a Christian; otherwise you are making up another religion all together – and you are following a different God! I suggest to you that these people need to end their charade – and either submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ or not. The truth is: you either believe what the Bible says – or you don't. **If you don't believe what the Bible says -- then please call yourself something other than a Christian – and start living whatever truth you do believe in.** I am grateful today that I am 'preaching to the choir' – but you need to know what is out there. The Apostle John warns us of this kind of deception with these words from 2 John 1:7-9 "*Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.*"

Some major questions arise among many people today – belief in what; belief in whom? We as followers of Jesus Christ – like Abraham, believe in God the Father; we also believe that God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world – so that "*whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*" (John 3:16) In addition, we believe that God sent His Holy Spirit, who as Jesus told us in His words from John 14:26: "*the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.*" If we acknowledge and believe that much, then we also should accept and profess Jesus as our Lord and Savior – seeking a deeper relationship with Him, through prayer and through spending time reading and listening to His Holy Word. And yet, we still are fighting a battle with those who do not believe and question the truth – especially the Bible as truth.

I want you to listen to the words of Jesus that He spoke in Matthew 7:24-27 "*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But*

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everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." If the foundation is faulty – so is its future. If our faith – our belief in Jesus Christ and the Words that He spoke to us, is solid – as if built on the rock – then our future is undeniable. But if we waffle or waver, unsure of what we believe or if we even believe at all, then we are like the foolish person who built on sand – and our future is like that old song "Dust in the Wind." An even worse scenario is the person who begins with this solid foundation – but "sells out" to the world – "sells out" to the popular thinking of the masses: you know -- "you believe what you want and I'll believe what I want." "We'll all be OK, because we are good people!" In my honest opinion – that kind of thinking is the poison that destroys. Faith is supposed to transform culture, but with a weak foundation the opposite happens – culture transforms the faith and Satan loves it that way! When the foundation weakens – it's easy for him to seep into the sand that remains.

Today, as we worship and celebrate the Holy Eucharist, let us thank God the Father for His Son and His sacrifice, for the gift of His Word, and let our true identity reflect who we truly are, who we truly love, and what we truly believe. Only the Holy Spirit can help us to be who we say we are, to show the world Jesus in our hearts– reflecting the image of God through our love and belief in Jesus Christ – and His true identity.