

God's Love Brings Joy

August 23, 2020

Matthew 16: 13-20

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.

Romans 12: 1-8

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all

the members have the same function,⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith;⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

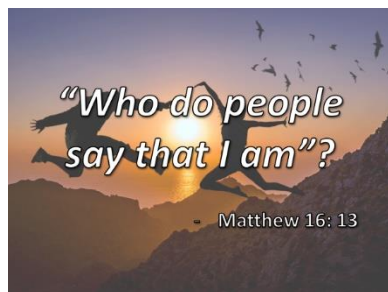


This morning we come to the conclusion of this summer's "God at the Movies" sermon series. We have worked our way through ten Pixar movies and through major sections of six chapters from both Romans and Matthew. We have talked about how God lifts us up and about how God knows us inside-out. We have talked about how God draws us in, cleaning us up and freeing us from sin. We have talked about how God works with and guides our faith stories. Most recently we have talked about how God gives love and loves all people. Today we turn to the last topic in this sermon series: how God's love brings joy into our lives. Next Sunday, as we celebrate "Back to School" Sunday, we will begin a new sermon series called "Learning to Love our Enemies". As we begin the message this morning, let us pray...



As we begin this morning, I invite you to turn to Matthew 16. In today's passage we find Jesus alone with the disciples. He has been in ministry with them for almost three years. During this time Jesus has become a popular figure for the

common people and has become increasingly despised by the religious leaders. At the start of chapter sixteen, the Pharisees and Sadducees again clash with Jesus, demanding a sign to prove his authority. As Jesus and the disciples depart and cross the lake, they head north. They travel to Caesarea Philippi, a town about 25 miles north of Capernaum, Jesus' home base on the north shore of the



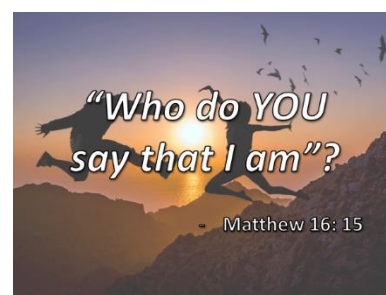
Sea of Galilee. Finding some time alone, Jesus warns the disciples of the deceptive teaching of the religious leaders. As we turn to verse thirteen, Jesus asks the disciples, "*Who do people say that I am*"? It is a question that I think we need to be prepared to answer

too. People may not ask us who we say Jesus is, but if we are living out our faith, they will notice, and they may very well ask what makes us different than other people. In answering what Jesus means to us or by explaining the difference that Jesus makes in our life, we are answering this question.

The answers that the disciples give reflects the variety of opinions on just who Jesus really was. Some say "*John the Baptist*" – Herod and others thought Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected. "*Others say Elijah*" – the prophet many Jews expected to return as a forerunner of the Messiah. Yet another group identified Jesus as a newly raised "*Jeremiah the prophet*". Jesus' strong stances on many sensitive matters such as marriage and divorce drew comparisons to Jeremiah's ministry. If we asked this question today, the variety of answers would be much greater than the handful given by the disciples this day. All of the answers that the disciples gave in some way connected Jesus to God and their faith. If we asked this same question today, common answers from those who do not

believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior would include: he was a good man, he was a wonderful teacher, maybe he healed some people and performed some other miracles, he did good work with the poor and outcast, he was a prophet. Just as it was in Jesus' day, many people today would struggle to really identify who Jesus Christ actually was and continues to be. In *Ratatouille* we see a similar struggle with how the rats perceive humans. Remy is the exception. He is drawn to humans. In human beings Remy sees life and creative ability and he is drawn to their cooking – the way it creates new flavors by combining old. But the rest of the rats, and especially his father Django, sees humans as hateful and as the enemy. As Remy is drawn closer and closer to human beings he begins to walk upright. This symbolic shift is an early turning point in the movie. Remy's answer to who human beings are is as different from his father's answer as our answers would be compared to the secular world's answers to this question concerning who Jesus is.

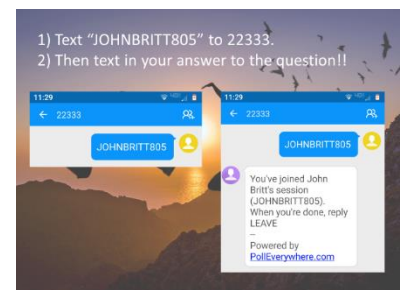
In verse fifteen Jesus turns the question to the disciples. Here he asks, *"But who do YOU say I am"?* It is now the disciples turn to answer. Always the eager one, Peter responds first. In the next verse Peter declares, *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"*. Peter's answer is straight forward, full of faith. Jesus quickly moves to praising Peter. He shares that Peter is blessed because God has revealed this to him. Through a revelation from God, Peter knows Jesus is the Messiah, the one Israel has been longing for and waiting for. Jesus goes on to tell Peter that he will be the rock upon which *"my church will be built"* and that the gates of Hell *"will not*



prevail against it". Jesus is clear that the church will be his church and not Peter's and that it will be Jesus that builds the church, not Peter. Jesus is also telling Peter and the disciples and even us today that Satan will never conquer or prevail against the church of Jesus Christ. Peter, and later all of the disciples, are promised the keys to the kingdom of heaven. These "keys" are the knowledge and authority to teach in Jesus' name. Through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit the disciples will do just this, going forth to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Our passage from Matthew 16 closes with a stern warning from Jesus to the disciples. He ordered them not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. This warning was rooted in who the Jews thought the Messiah would be. They were looking for a glorious, conquering Messiah – another mighty warrior like King David. Jesus knew it would be far better for him to complete his mission and ministry while keeping this knowledge within the inner circle of the disciples. Upon his death and resurrection, the true identity of Jesus as Messiah would be revealed to the world.

As this question hangs on the screen, let us take a moment to answer it ourselves. Now, "Messiah" has been taken. So, Grace United Methodist Church, who do you say Jesus is? If you have a cell phone, take it out – whether here or at home – and text "JOHNBRITT805" to 22333. Here is what it looked like on my cell phone.

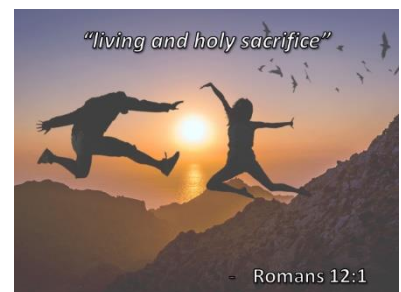


You will get a message that you have joined poll and an invitation to text in your answer. As people send in their answers to the question, "Who do YOU say Jesus is?" they will appear on the screen. Ready, set, go!!

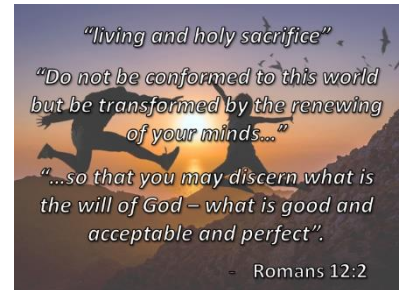
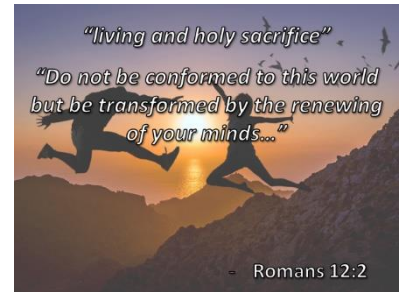


Now that we have defined who we believe Jesus to be, I invite you to turn with me to Romans 12. Here we join Paul, one who assuredly saw Jesus as the Messiah, as his Lord and Savior, and as the Savior of the whole

world. In chapters 12 through 15, Paul sets out the moral and ethical demands of the good news of Jesus Christ. For Paul, the gift of salvation required a response from us, as believers. God is not satisfied with our simply receiving the gift; he wants to also transform our lives. In today's eight verses, the opening to this section of Romans, Paul urges all believers to live their lives as a "*living and holy sacrifice*" to God. Paul understood very well that a life of faith would often require sacrifice. He was a man who experienced beatings and even a stoning, who suffered shipwreck and near drowning, who was persecuted and ridiculed by the religious leaders of the day as well as by the many pagans he encountered during his missionary journeys. So, when Paul calls the people of the church in Rome and the people of the church today to be "*living and holy sacrifices*", he speaks from a place of experience. Paul implores to us to present our "*bodies*" as our offering to God. By "*bodies*" he is referring to our whole selves, not just to our physical bodies.



This becomes evident as we read on. In verse two we read, *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds"*. Here Paul connects our response with God's desire: when we refuse to conform, God transform us into something new. Continuing in this verse, we hear the "why": *"so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect"*. Before we get to hung up on the *"acceptable and perfect"* ideas, Paul brings us back down to earth. He warns us not to think



too highly of ourselves but to *"think with sober judgment"* as we consider our own measure of faith. To the church in Rome, Paul was addressing the arrogance of some of the more mature believers who thought they had stronger faith than those newer to a faith in Christ. We see both sides of this in the movie for this week. Chef Skinner is arrogant and looks down on all of the other chefs in the kitchen at Gusteau's Restaurant, especially upon young Linguini. Remy also struggles with this fault. He sees the garbage that the other rats so willingly eat as disgusting and below him. His father Django even comments that his son now "sounds like a human" – and this is not a compliment. It is a fine line to think well enough of ourselves to have good self-esteem but not to highly lest we develop arrogance and too much pride.

This was happening in the church in Rome and to was causing a lot of discord, as it would in any church. Humility was one of the virtues that Christ practiced and that he calls us to practice. This call connects into Paul's next statement.

In verses four and five Paul addresses the unity and diversity found in the church. Paul understood that for the church in Rome and for all healthy churches, both unity and diversity must be present. Paul speaks of the beauty of unity and diversity in verses four through eight. In verses four and five we read these words: *"For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another"*. We realize this truth when we look around the Sanctuary on a Sunday morning or when we participate in a team or leadership meeting or when we come to youth group and see the adults filling their various roles. At our most basic level, we are one in Christ, one in the faith. Christ is what brings us our unity. But just like each person in this picture, we are unique. In verses six through eight Paul lists some of the gifts and graces that make us unique: prophet, minister, teacher, exhorter or encourager, giver, leader, compassionate and caring servants.



This list reminds me of my days teaching middle school. When I met someone outside of school and they asked what I did, I told them I taught middle school. Most often the reaction I got was either "Ewww" or "God bless you". For most people, middle schoolers are an acquired taste. Not too many acquire the taste. I believe many of us respond the same way to some of the titles on Paul's list. For example, some hear "leader" and they know that is one of their gifts. Others hear it and are scared to death. But that is the beauty of the church. We do not all have to be leaders. And we do not all want to be leaders. Imagine if all we

had at Grace United Methodist Church was a bunch of leaders. We do have some wonderful leaders. We also have many great workers. In these ways we each bring our own diversity to the body and we help the body to function well.

We see an example of this in the movie for this week, *"Ratatouille"*. The secret to the great soup is what all goes into the dish – the diversity of ingredients. Imagine eating a soup with just water and potatoes. Or imagine eating macaroni and cheese with nothing but macaroni and powdered cheese in the recipe – no milk, no butter, no salt and pepper. The idea of diversity leading to greatness is what we saw with the soup in the movie. Only by Remy's culinary skills were just the right ingredients added to make the perfect soup. It was a dash of this and a pinch of that. It was a sample taste and an adjustment, a sample taste and another adjustment, that ended up with the perfect blend. So it is with the church. Our unique blend of leaders and workers, of teachers and learners, of encouragers and ministers, of compassionate souls and generous givers makes the church beautiful. Our diversity, brought together in Christ, is what makes our church wonderful and great.



Service is one way that God's love brings us joy. We each are gifted by God. Every single one of us have gifts and graces that we have been blessed with. All of us.



Paul begins chapter twelve by calling us to be "*living sacrifices*". This is one of our acts of worship. Yes, being a living sacrifice is pleasing to God and living a life of service keeps us aligned with God's purposes and will for our lives. But it also brings us joy. If you doubt it, I dare you to find an area to serve here at the church or in the larger community. Humble service bringing joy is also played out in the movie. After his staff abandoned him and Remy's clan came to the rescue, young Chef Linguini dons a pair of roller skates and begins swooping around the dining room delivering plates, refilling wine glasses, taking orders. He was not a chef. He had no place in the kitchen. But he was right in his element as he zoomed around the dining room, bringing joy both to himself and to those dining in Gusteau's that night, including the renowned critic Anton Ego.

Christ himself set the example of how to find our role and to find joy in living out that role. Above all, Jesus sought to be a humble servant. It is in serving the other, it is in humbly placing their needs above our own, that we too can find the joy of living out our faith. When you see a child smile because you taught them about Jesus, when you see a mother swell up with tears because she can now feed her children, when you offer your voice or your hands so that others can connect to God in worship, when you bring fresh produce to a rescue shelter or to the food bank so that others can enjoy the bounty of God's creation, when you give to the ministries of the church – there is a joy that God's love puts in your heart. This week may we all seek to experience the joy that God's love brings as we seek ways to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. As always, may it be so for me and for you. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) Grow. How has your understanding of “who” Jesus is grown as your faith has matured? Who do you hope to come to know Jesus as?
- 2) Pray. How do you live as a *“living and holy sacrifice”* to God? Pray for God to continue to transform you to be *“good and pleasing and perfect”*.
- 3) Study. Read Matthew 16: 21-28. How could Peter go from hero to goat? Why does this happen to him? When have you experienced something similar to this on your faith journey? How was God working in you?