

13th Sunday after Pentecost
August 23, 2026
By: Deacon Ben Remmert

Isaiah 51:1-6

Psalms 138

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew 16:13-20

Grace and peace to you from our Lord, Jesus who is the Christ. Amen

Life is full of questions, especially these last few weeks as children and youth are returning to school and fall programs are kicking off. Questions are everywhere. Who are my new teachers? Will my old friends be in my class? What will I wear today? What do I want to be when I grow up? What will tomorrow bring? What am I having for dinner? Can we have dessert?

Not only do these practical questions beg for an answer, but also questions concerning our spiritual life. Am I saved? When I die will I go to heaven? What is my purpose? Why do bad things happen to good people?

The common element with all questions is that we yearn to have the answer. We can search for the answers to most questions but in our search for answers, we often find more questions. We can find it ourselves or when we do not know the answer, we can surrender the question to God and dwell in the mystery of the question not having an answer. This morning our scriptures have some questions for us to ponder.

In our gospel lesson Jesus asks the disciples what they have heard about him. Jesus is taking a survey. He wants to hear from his disciples, his followers. Jesus had asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" That is, what are people saying about Me? So, the disciples said, some think that you are John the Baptist. Now remember, John the Baptist had been beheaded. But people thought that John's spirit had moved over to Jesus and so some considered him as John the Baptist. Others were saying that He was Elijah. For it was promised that Elijah would return at the time of the Messiah. And Jesus had done miracles like Elijah. Just as Elijah had raised the widow of Zarephath, Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain. And just as Elijah had multiplied the flour and the oil, Jesus had multiplied bread, as we read about in the feeding of the five thousand a few weeks ago. So, some were saying that Jesus was Elijah. Others were saying that Jesus was the prophet; for God had promised to raise up a prophet like Moses. Hearing this question, you may wonder to yourself, "who do people say that Jesus is?"

Then Jesus gets close and asks the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" Now we are getting personal. Peter responds: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." In his answer (which I picture as a youth who knows the answer, but is afraid to say it), Peter was acknowledging the very nature of Jesus. Peter must have known that Jesus was unique, Peter knew Jesus was more than a man. Through spending time with Jesus, building a relationship with him, Peter was able to see past the man and with the help of God, he was able to see the divinity in Jesus and reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Just as God reveals Jesus' identity to him, God reveals God's self to us, but I wonder if we can pay attention? We can miss experiencing God who is all around us because at times we get so caught up in ourselves that we cannot focus on God's movements. We are pummeled with one message after another. You need this; you want that. You must do this to be happy and successful. You must look out for yourself. These messages are repeated to us until this becomes our reality. We struggle to live as God calls us to be, in relationship with our neighbors and God. We confess our sins and we repent, but it seems useless at times as it feels like a never-ending cycle and can easily feel hopeless. But dear siblings in Christ, there is hope!

St. Paul writes, in our epistle today, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God- what is good and acceptable and perfect." Instead of conforming, we are transformed! In our baptism our lives were renewed. We received faith. In that faith, we see that Jesus is the Messiah. We do not have to build ourselves up. Jesus promises that He will build His Church. That means not only that He is building His church, but He is building us up as well, his living stones. And the work that was begun in our baptism, and through the nourishment of the holy meal; the building us up continues.

Much as Peter's revelation of the living God, we are called to accept God's calling to build relationships with our neighbors so that we can love them as God loves us. Through these relationships, our minds will be renewed and transformed. Christ is building us up through one another, and through each other (with the Holy Spirit), we are invited to the work that God is doing in the world; to overpower hate, grief, hopelessness, anger, shame, and despair with God's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and gentleness for the whole world. Thanks be to God. Amen.