

**Sunday August 23, 2020 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**

**Bible Study – Matthew 16:13-20; Romans 12:1-8  
“Who Do You Say?”**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have each participant answer the question, “When was the last time you felt pressured to conform to someone’s or some other group’s desire?”

**Matthew 16:13-20. Context:** Matthew's audience would have understood several things about the history of Caesarea Philippi, the location of this week's reading: located about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, the town stands near the cave of one of the principal springs that feeds the Jordan River. It had been a cult center for the Canaanite god Baal, and then transformed in Hellenistic times into a shrine to the Greek god Pan, in turn transformed into a temple to Caesar by Herod the Great. Herod's son Philip made it the capital of the region he ruled, renaming it Caesarea Philippi. (Philip's brother, Herod Antipas, had been accused by John the Baptist of unlawfully marrying Philip's ex-wife. We know how that turned out!) At the end of the Jewish Wars in 70, the Roman Emperor Titus took a little R&R at Caesarea Philippi, entertained by numbers of Jewish captives being thrown to wild beasts. As for the reading itself, in response to Simon's confession, Jesus gives him a nickname, "Rocky" (Peter, from the Greek petros, rock - not really a Greek personal name before this time). The focus here on Peter may have something to do with Peter having preached early on in Antioch, which is also the traditional location for the writing of Matthew's gospel. The "keys" and the "binding and loosing" refer to the teaching authority (à la the rabbis of his day), given here to Peter, and in Matthew 18 to the church as a whole. Matthew's is the only gospel that uses the word "church" to describe the community of Jesus' followers, and that, only twice.

**Romans 12:1-8. Context:** Romans 12 begins the final section of the letter that sums up what it means to live with Christian hope and trust in God, since now through Christ the Law has been fulfilled and the promises extended to all people. In this week's reading, Paul lays down the basic framework for living together as the body of Christ. In the opening verse, Paul uses the term "body" to mean our whole being: heart, mind, soul, and strength. The "measure of faith" to which he refers later on probably does not mean to suggest that some have more faith than others – that was an issue about which he was criticized the Christians in Corinth but that the faith we share is measured out the same for each person. Faith is faith: whatever our gifts and talents, we share the same faith.

**Read Matthew 16:13-20; Romans 12:1-8**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn't make sense to you in the story?

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

**Read Matthew 16:13-20; Romans 12:1-8 again**

**Some reflection questions – Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.**

- What might it mean to “present our bodies as a living sacrifice”
- What does it look like to be “conformed to this world”? What does it look like to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind”? What are some practices that can help us to live “transformed” and not “conformed”?
- What might it look like for a church community to truly embody verses 3-6? A community that takes seriously the call to humility (v. 3), honor and bless each other in their unique gifts (v. 4 and 6), and be members of one another (v. 5)?
- What do you already know about the area of Caesarea Philippi? (Use Study Bibles or other resources such as the internet to find out more, if needed.) It is the perfect backdrop for Jesus to ask his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” What do we learn about Jesus from this passage?
- What do you think Jesus means by declaring to Peter, “on *this* rock I will build my church (v. 18)? How is *this* transformative to Peter? To all disciples?
- How is declaring Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, not just something Christians do with their lips, but with their lives?

**Read Matthew 16:13-20; Romans 12:1-8 again**

**Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Each person prays sharing their answer the following statements:

I ask God for....

I thank God for.....

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, pray the closing prayer. Ask for a volunteer to lead the group or read the following prayer in unison:

Living God, we give you thanks that we are not alone. You are ever-present, and we live this life surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1). Give us the faith to commit our time and talents to serving you within the church and to those who are looking to belong in the family of God. Energize us to live with all that we are and to live the faith we confess with our mouths.

**Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven  
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power  
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.