

Sunday, August 27, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Bible Study
“Who Do You Say?”
Exodus 1:8-2:10 and Matthew 16:13-20

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, ask participants, “What comes to mind when you hear the word ‘journey’?”

Exodus 1:8-2:10. Context. The book of Genesis ends after Jacob and his entire family migrated to Egypt, settling in the land of Goshen on the eastern side of the Nile delta. On his deathbed, Jacob gave his blessing to his sons, with Joseph requesting that his blessing be given to his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. (The tribe of Manasseh will go on to settle the largest part of the land of Canaan and the tribe of Ephraim, perhaps the most powerful of the tribes over the course of Israel's history, will settle the central and strategic region north of Jerusalem.) After Jacob dies, Joseph's brothers seek reassurance from him that he will not seek vengeance from them; Joseph for his part pledges to take care of them. With the opening of Exodus, Joseph, his brothers, and their entire generation had passed away. This week's reading recounting the birth of Moses was used by Matthew to shape his account of King Herod's slaughter of the innocents in the Christmas story.

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 (a 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.

Read Exodus 1:8-2:10 and Matthew 16:13-20

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 text?

Read Exodus 1:8-2:10 and Matthew 16:13-20 again -

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

“When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river” (Ex 2:3).

- What might Moses's mother have thought Baby Moses's journey would be when she hid him in a basket on the river?
- Pharaoh's daughter found Moses and decided to adopt him. Moses grew up as a prince and later delivered his people from Egypt. Moses's life could have ended in the river, yet he became one of the most significant leaders in the Bible. What might you learn from the story of Moses for your journey?
- “Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’” (Mathew 16:13) The region of Caesarea Philippi (northeast of the Sea of Galilee) was a pagan city known for various gods and idols. Some say it was important for Jesus to hear his disciples claim who he was to separate him from false gods and idols. In our world today, some people seem to “worship” money, sports, and clothes more than Jesus. How have you experienced this?
- “Jesus said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:15-16). Who do you say Jesus is? [Savior, Redeemer, Bread of Life, Lord, Prince of Peace, Friend, Son of God, Alpha and Omega, Prophet, Teacher, Master, Shephard.] What do those names mean to you?

“Maybe for us, it could mean what St. Francis of Assisi is reported to have said: “Preach always; use words if necessary.” Maybe Jesus’ stern warning to us is to not be casual with his name. Don’t tell unless you are willing to live. Don’t announce if you can’t reflect. Don’t bear witness with your words if your habits won’t witness to him too.”

- What might it look like to “Preach always; use words if necessary” for you? Are there things you could do to proclaim his name?
- Imagine holding a ticket for transportation (bus, train, airplane, etc.) for somewhere God wants us to go. What spiritual journey does God want us to take? What is your first step this week to being closer to your spiritual destination?

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). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer: This week we used **the Apostle’s Creed** (Ecumenical Version – *United Methodist Hymnal*, 882)

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic (or *universal*) church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. **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.