

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 13
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Sermon by Pastor Dan Pautz
The church is built on the rock

¹³ When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴ They said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵ He said to them, “But you, who do you say that I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he commanded the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

—Matthew 16:13-20

Many English words have more than one meaning. Take the word bear for example. It can mean to carry – “What a friend We Have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear.” Or it has different meanings when we speak about a tree bearing fruit or a soldier bearing arms or she bears a likeness to her grandmother or the animal bear and of course, the Chicago Bears. You just have to bear with me.

The word church has different meanings, four of them.

1)A Building – The outside of the church is scheduled to be painted.

2)A Congregation – I am a member of Emmanuel Lutheran Church.

3)A denomination – a larger church body. Someone might answer the question, “What church do you go to?” by saying “I am a Lutheran” or “I am a Methodist” or “I am a Catholic”.

4)The Holy Christian Church that is spoken of in both the Apostles and Nicene Creed which is the group of all true believers regardless of their visible church affiliation. Sometimes I have heard the unjust criticism that we of the Wisconsin Synod think that only those who are members of our church body or of other conservative Lutheran churches will be saved. That is not our position whatsoever nor has it ever been. I have been around for 80 years and have never been taught that or firsthand heard it being taught. The fact is that whoever has faith in Jesus is going to heaven.

We are in a short sermon series titled “The Church God Wants.” That title is obviously not speaking about a church building nor is it simply referring to the Holy Christian Church but mostly about a congregation and a denomination. Now if someone would ask me what church should they join, I would first of all say “Make sure you are a member of the Holy Christian Church. Make sure you have saving faith in Jesus.” But if that person is asking what congregation he/she should join, I could quickly answer, “Emmanuel Lutheran Church or one of our other WELS congregations or congregations in fellowship with us.” And when they would ask why, the deeper answer could be summed up by saying that the church he/she joins should be built upon the Rock. The Rock is the Person of Christ and His teachings. It is to be built upon the correct understanding of who Jesus is and upon the Bible. What is more important than the style of the service is substance. What is more important than how a message is presented is what the message is. What is more important than the type of music used in the worship service is the message itself. And by the way, I feel that our congregation’s music program is excellent and topnotch.

There were many different opinions in Jesus day as to who He was. Of course, the Pharisees and others like them believed that He was an imposter. But most did not. Many thought that Jesus was a great prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah or even John the Baptist come back to life. But most fell short of believing who Jesus really was. It was Peter who usually was the spokesman of the Apostles who said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And that was and is the correct answer. In fact, the church, the Holy Christian Church, is built upon that answer and all that it implies. Jesus said, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it.”

The title ‘Son of God’ that Jesus has means that He is true God. The Pharisees and other enemies of Jesus knew full well that the title Son of God meant true God. As they attempted to stone Jesus, they said, “We are stoning you for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God” (John 10:33). And true God He indeed is. He is

the Second Person in the Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-2).

Do you know that many churches right in our own community are not building upon Christ the Rock for they reject the truth that Christ is God. They do not believe nor would they say the words of the Nicene Creed which we are about to say. For example, these words for sure are rejected:

"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, Begotten not made, of one being with the Father."

You want a church in which Jesus is front and center. You want one which clearly teaches that Jesus is the Christ as Peter said. At the heart and core of its teachings must be that our Lord Jesus Christ came to save us sinners and that through Him we have forgiveness and eternal life. Paul wrote that his message was Jesus and Him crucified. The cross says it all. Do you know that on the outside of our new building a cross is about to be mounted and it will be very visible for all. And there are many crosses in our church. Count them but not now.

Make sure that you build your spiritual house on Christ the Rock and also on His teachings. God wants the church to be built upon the Person of Christ and His teachings. What would you think of a person who says, "I believe in Jesus. I know He is the Christ and the Second Person in the Trinity. But I don't believe everything He teaches?" Then he gives as an example that he does not believe the words of Jesus in John 14 where Jesus teaches that He is the only way to heaven. That's like saying, "I have a really great doctor. I like him a lot. I trust him. But I really don't believe much of what he says or the prescriptions he wants me to take?" I think we would say to that person, "You really don't trust your doctor, do you? You better start trusting him or get a new doctor."

Well, we cannot get a new Christ. Building on Him means we trust what He says. When the Lord was about to ascend into heaven, He gave this command to His followers, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

How do we know what Jesus taught? Jesus taught the Bible. Let's look at the evidence that Jesus taught the Bible. If you were with Jesus during His ministry, you would surely see that Jesus taught the Scriptures.

1. When Jesus preached and taught in the synagogues He used the Bible. For example, when Jesus preached in His home town of Nazareth, He read a section from the Book of Isaiah and preached on it.

2. A look at the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John shows that Jesus quoted the Old Testament Scriptures 78 times.

3. It has been estimated that over one-tenth of Jesus' words recorded in the New Testament are taken from the Old Testament. 180 of the 1,800 verses that record His conversations are either Old Testament quotes or Old Testament references.

4. Everything He taught was in perfect harmony with the Bible.

5. Notice how He used the Bible to answer questions. When asked about marriage and divorce, Jesus quoted from Genesis. "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:4-6). And notice also that in this answer Jesus was showing that he did not believe in evolution and He also showed that there are only two genders, two sexes.

6. He called the Bible the truth (John 17:17).

7. Christ taught both the Law and the Gospel as the Bible does and as His church must do.

1. He preached the law. He did not regard the Ten Commandments as ten suggestions but regarded them as the truth. He repeatedly called upon people to repent of their sins. We might think that Jesus spoke only of love and goodness and joy. But also He preached the Law to lead people to know they needed help. He warned the people about sins such as hatred and lust and name calling. He spoke out against greed and hypocrisy and selfishness. He stated that if they thought they could get to heaven simply by being good, they would have to be perfect. He said, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:3). He did not mince words when the situation called for it.

2. He preached the sweet Gospel. The church God wants is one that leads people to heaven. You know the words of John 3:16. Do you know who spoke them? It was Jesus Himself. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish

but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:16-18). Jesus said, "I came to seek and to save those who were lost" (Luke 19:10). He also said – and this sounds like a mission statement, "I came not to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). And on the cross did not Jesus pray, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" ?

The church God wants is one that leads people to repentance and then to the saving message of the Gospel. He wants His church to be built upon the Rock of Christ and His teachings, the Bible. When we have a memorial service here at church, we place a round table in the front. On it usually is a picture of our fellow believer who died and is now in heaven. There might also be some decorations and flowers. But always placed there are a freestanding cross about 2 ½ feet tall and a Bible. Having the cross and the Bible on the table show that the person had built his life upon Christ the Rock and His teachings.

The new Ministry and Education Center is being built. You can now note the progress on the building project as week by week you come to the Sunday church services. But for the first months of the building project you likely did not see much progress. Perhaps you did notice that some ground was moved here and there, but that was about it. But important and vital things were happening. The foundation was being carefully prepared. The top sixteen inches of soil were removed and hauled away for it was not suitable for a foundation to be placed on it. New ground was hauled in. Then trenches were dug for the foundation and they had to be the correct depth. Rebar had to be placed in the trenches. At many points along the way the city inspector had to give approval for the foundation preparation. Then the concrete was poured. And finally, having the proper foundation, the building itself could be erected.

The Lord wants His church to be built correctly. It is to be built upon the Rock who is the person and teaching of Jesus. He wants you to build your spiritual life on that Rock.

On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand (Words from Hymn 563 – Christian Worship).