

*Twenty First Sunday Ordinary
Time*

Matthew 16:13-20

August 21, 2014

The other day a friend shared with me the day he heard those dreaded words from his son Luke:

Hey, Dad, can I have the keys to the car?

Luke asked his dad for the car keys for the very first time. We owned a Chevy station wagon—it wasn't fancy, but it was big. He had just got my license. So dad handed him the keys in slow motion—he had a look of anguish and doubt on his face. +

Luke grabbed the keys, spun on my heels, and yelled "Thanks!" as he ran out the door.

He picked-up my closest friend just down the street; away from his house, because he was

forbidden to ride in a car without an adult.

No matter—this was a big deal, and this was Luke's big day. He had dad's keys, and he was driving his car for the first time. Who did he think he was?—the best driver on the road, that's who.

It didn't take long before Luke got into trouble.

It was in big parking lot in the neighboring city.

It was cramped and the spaces were close together.

Luke got in OK—it was getting out that was the problem.

When he was backing out he turned the wheel too sharply and hit the car next to me. Yes he stopped instantly. The car was locked up against the left rear fender of the car next to them.

After lots of debate with his friend, Luke decided to keep

backing out. Bad decision—he scraped the entire side of his dad’s car, as he finally got out of the parking spot.

If it wasn’t the end of the world, it sure felt like it. He drove home in silence, and he made his friend promise not to tell anyone what had happened.

He remembers Luke walking in the house, and explaining what he had done.

Dad had this very unusual look on his face . . . and Luke just handed him back the keys, without saying another word.

It was a long time before he asked for them again. It turned out that, “Luke wasn’t who he thought he was.”—He wasn’t the best driver on the road after all.

His Dad told me in hindsight, if Luke really learned and remembered that important life lesson, and was still able to walk away from it, Dad said it

was worth very scrap on the car.

You see taking of keys comes with a great responsibility.

The teenager who receives the car keys for the first time.

The couple who buys their first house receives the keys from the builder at closing.

Dignitaries receive the keys to the city as a gesture of welcome and appreciation.

Today's gospel has to do with keys.

Before Jesus hands over the keys, he poses a question, "Who do **people** think I am?"

There were lots of answers.

The disciples give him the public opinion.

Then Jesus presses the question at a more personal level, "Who do **you** say that I am?" This time he wasn't leaving them any wiggle room.

You can just imagine the disciples standing around, looking at each other, hemming and hawing, trying to figure out what to say.

And it's Peter who comes to the rescue. Good old Peter!

You could call Peter many things, but uncertain wasn't one of them.

He spoke for all the others, and . . . he got it right.

And Jesus says to Peter, "I am giving you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven." And Peter is changed, forever—it even gets a new name and a new identity.

Those same keys in the hands of Jesus opened ears, eyes, and hearts.

Those keys, in the hands of Jesus, shut out darkness, evil, and death.

Now those keys came with a huge responsibility—they unlock heaven’s door.

So, Jesus turns to us—“You! You there! Yes, you . . . Who do **you** say that I am?”

The question hangs in the air—it won’t go away.

We do our own hemming and hawing, and perhaps we point to others.

And Jesus says, “I’m not interested in what others think; I want to know what **you** think.”

We realize who he is, but who is he really?

He has come into our lives and rearranged our worlds, but who is he and why can’t we come up with an answer?

Who is he who multiplies loaves of bread, who walks on turbulent waters, who cures with words or a simple touch?

Who is he who told us that he was the bread of life, the shepherd, the vine, the light, the truth and the life?

Who is he? Is he one of these or all of these? (Pause)

We carry this question in our hearts throughout our lives—it is asked of us over and over. It's a question that can grow and mature in us as achievements, tragedies, and sufferings shape us and change us. It's a deeply personal question—just between us and Christ.

It may be the most important question we'll ever have to answer.

So, how are we going to answer it?

“You are the Messiah, the one who will establish peace and justice on the earth, and I offer my services to you.”

“You are the Son of God, the one who will ensure that the

weakest and most vulnerable of society will not be exploited, and I will stand in their defense.”

“You are the Messiah, the one who will usher in the kingdom of peace here on earth, and I commit myself to the practice of peace.”

There comes a time when we have to answer this question—we have to make our own confessions, just like Peter.

And just like when my dad handed me the car keys that first time, there will be risk, and there will be danger. Christ is standing there with the keys—what are we going to say?

He’s here with us right now, among us, present in this gathering as he always is—the walking, talking, living presence of God in our lives.

And in a few moments, he’ll be on this Altar.

When we process to communion, when we extend our hands, just like reaching for the keys, when we consume his body and blood, will we be able to give him our final answer—“Who do you say that I am?”

Like Peter we will say: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Not just words off the lips but words from the heart.

Today when you go into the parking lot and start your car or open the front door of your house, or unlock the lock that is keeping your bike from being taken.

Remember with those keys comes a great responsibility.