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This is an outline of my sermon text for the **12th Sunday after Pentecost**, on **August 23, 2020**. My focus was on the Gospel lesson, **Matthew 16:13-20**, Jesus asking His disciples who they say he is. + pBRC

May God guide us as we step out in faith, doing God's work with our hands and hearts.
AMEN.

- We are over half-way through Matthew's Gospel. It is time for the disciples' mid-term exam. He wants to find out what they have learned from their time with him.
 - He gives them a warm-up question.
 - **"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"**^A
 - Jesus wants to know what the people who have been coming to him think of him.
 - He has been drawing crowds wherever He has travelled within Israel, with people wanting to be healed, to be cured, to be fed, and to learn from Him.
 - Even when He ventures outside of Israel, he still has people wanting healing and miracles, but they come in smaller groups, or individuals such as the Canaanite woman who came to Jesus in last week's lesson.
 - Since His disciples are able to meet and talk with the people who are coming to Jesus, He wants to know what they have learned.
 - **"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"**
 - They tell Him people think He one of the legendary figures of their faith, Elijah, Jeremiah or another prophet brought back to life.
 - These figures were great teachers and preachers. Some were even blessed by God with the ability to perform miracles.
 - Others shared thoughts that he might be John the Baptizer come back to life.
 - Now it is time for the mid-term. Please put away all materials, and write legibly.

- **“Who do you say that I am?”^B**
- The first to answer, the only one to answer is Simon Peter.
 - **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”^C**
 - Jesus tells Simon Peter he aced the exam. Jesus also tells Peter he had help.
 - Peter was given the insight from God, our Creator.
- But that confession of who Jesus truly is, that he is the Son of God here on Earth, is one of the key tenants and understanding of our faith.
 - Calling Jesus the Son of God is a revelatory statements in the Gospels.
 - It declares you have seen the great power of Jesus Christ, or you put your trust in that great power.
 - The disciples declared it after Jesus walked up to their boat on the water. ^D
 - Martha declared it before He raised her brother Lazarus. ^E
 - The Centurion declared it after Jesus died on the Cross. ^F
- I believe Peter’s confession is the rock upon which the church is built, not Peter himself.
 - It is part of the Apostle’s Creed we will say following the hymn and my message: ***I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord.*** ^G
 - We don’t say it because we have seen the works and miracles of Christ.
 - We say it because it has been taught to us.
 - We say it because it has been revealed to us.
 - We know who Jesus is because a whole variety of the saints God has placed in our lives have told us of God’s love, have shown us God’s love and have been God’s love for us.
 - We say it because we have felt God’s love in our lives, most often and most notably in the times when we have felt farthest from it. In those times of deep despair and being alone, God’s love shines drawing us out of the depths.
 - Jesus being the Messiah, the One whom was promised to save us from our sins, and Jesus being the Son of the Living God, who was sent to die and be raised so that death is defeated.
 - Peter’s answer to Jesus’ question is the faith-filled promise of what God has done for us, the promises upon which our faith is built.
 - That statement is the foundation of our faith, and when we confess it with our lips, and when we believe it in our hearts and when we put it into action in our lives, then we become the foundation upon which Christ’s church is built.
 - We are the rock. It is on us the Jesus build the church.

- Feeling a little pressure?
- What we need to remember is what Martin Luther re-discovered in Scripture that started the Reformation. It isn't about what we do, it is all about what Christ has already done for us.
 - We are the rock, but the church is Christ's. The shape of Jesus' church is cruciform.
 - That means it is cross-shaped.
 - It is built with arms extended to reach out to everyone.
 - It has a vertical structure that connects the Almighty with humanity.
 - The church is Jesus', but the work of the church in response to the gifts of God's grace are ours.
 - The work of the church is built upon our reaction to what God, through God's Son, the Messiah has done for us.
- The question that faces our group of churches is how we do that work, and where we do this work, and with whom we do this work.
 - Our three Covenant churches will be meeting in the next month to make the decision if we feel called to work toward becoming One Church Together.
 - In this process, this step is akin to getting engaged.
 - Each church has to be willing to say 'Yes,' with the promise of more togetherness to come.
 - We have to realize that there are still many times when each church has to say 'Yes' again.
 - But we need to realize there are many among us who will say "No."
 - Maybe enough for a church to say 'No,' or 'Not yet.'
 - As the pastor of the three Covenant Churches, I hope you will say, 'Yes.'
 - As the pastor of each church, I want each of you to know it is alright to say, 'No.'
 - I would ask that you trust the work that has been done so far, I ask that you trust those who will be working on this in the future, and I ask that you trust that I will do my best to hold the dreams and values and history and character of each church and bring them to whatever our end result is.
 - I would ask that you open yourself to what God is calling all of us, but more specifically, what God is calling you to do, where and how, God is calling you to be a church.
 - Because Jesus is building His church on you.
 - We are now trying to find out where to put it.
 - Let us pray.

- Living God, you gave us your Son to take our Sin and give us a new life. You call us all to be the foundation from which your church is built and grows. Strengthen our faith to hear where and how you want us to be that church. Lord, give us the faith to pass this test. Our hope is built on nothing less.

AMEN.

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- A Matthew 16:13.
 - B Matthew 16:15.
 - C Matthew 16:16.
 - D Matthew 14:33.
 - E John 11:27.
 - F Mark 15:39 and Matthew 27:54
 - G Apostle's Creed, Second Petition.