

Sermon- Our Saviors Lutheran Church - August 18th 2019

Text- Matthew 16:17-28

“Peter gets the Keys”

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. We continue with a Gospel that focuses on Peter. Last week to the question of who Jesus was - “Who Do You Say I Am? - Peter replies that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Today, Jesus tells Peter that upon his shoulders He will build his church and that he will give him the “keys” to his kingdom.

Keys - when I was pondering this homily, I smiled when I came to the word “keys”. The smile had to do with us receiving keys - keys to a vehicle. You know, passing the drivers test. It’s a big deal in Wisconsin, not so much where I grew up. First of all, in my day, one did not get a regular drivers license until one attained the age of 18. Secondly, we had no use for a car. Putting it in a garage cost as much as monthly rent on an apartment. After all we had taxis and subways. And parking it on the street was a pain in the neck because you had to move it every day - alternate street parking so that the street cleaners could do their job every day. Which reminds me of a story.

I left home at 18 to attend a Lutheran College in New Jersey, Upsala College. I had purchased a used car - figured I might need it - no taxis and subways there. What I failed to do was to read the entire handbook for incoming freshmen which stated that vehicles were not permitted for first year students. Well, you guessed it, I received a note to appear at the Dean’s office - he had found out I had a car on campus. I appeared and he informed me that I had to take the car home. I explained that I couldn’t do that. “Why not?” He asked. I then explained that in Brooklyn we had alternate street parking and that the car would have to be moved each day. “So, have your parents move the car”, he said. I told him that they couldn’t. “Why not” he asked. I said, “because they don’t drive”. There was a pause, and he said that he could check on that. I told him he should. Another pause occurred and he said, “keep your car, but don’t tell anyone.”

When we get our keys, there are some amazing feelings. Freedom, Power, Prestige, a wide open range of possibilities. Of course when our children get the keys to the car, there is a whole other range of emotions. Like, safety, worry, and

financial issues. Handing the keys over to a new teenage driver is not an easy, or cost free, rite of passage.

But let's get back to Peter and his keys. Yes, he received the keys to the kingdom but he had a lot to learn about what that meant. I wonder what he was thinking. Wow, the keys to the kingdom. Freedom from Roman rule? Power to overthrow the political structure of the day? Prestige in being in partnership with Jesus? Stable employment and guaranteed access to food and shelter? The sky is the limit when you're working with the Son of the living God! Right?

Well, maybe not so right. Jesus describes in some detail that it is necessary for him to suffer, and die. And of course Peter wants none of this talk. Jesus gets angry, and tells Peter "get behind me, Satan." Jesus is getting ready to do something very hard - to love and teach people right up to his very last breath on the cross - and Peter is trying to talk him out of it. Wouldn't any of us? Don't talk about death Jesus, don't upset the other disciples, don't rock the boat - we have a good ministry thing going here.

But, here is the most important part for you and me. After speaking these harsh words to Peter, Jesus doesn't walk away mad. He doesn't take away Peter's keys because of his wrong-headed thinking or inability to do the right thing. Instead, he says, "get behind me. Follow me. Listen to me. Do as I do."

The Keys. You see we have been given the keys just like Peter. We call it the church. As disciples, we have been given the keys to the kingdom. To forgive others, to serve others, to help make the kingdom of God in this place and time a faithful one.

Our role as a disciple, one who follows, is to listen deeply to Jesus' words, watch his actions closely, and then to lead by following those words and actions. To follow is to keep actively searching for what God needs us to do each day in order to love God's creation.

You have the Keys
Jesus was right.
We need to get behind him.

Use your keys not to drive a car, but to drive this church. Forgiving, caring, serving. Not power, but true Joy.

Amen. Let it be so.