ON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH

1. Not on movable stones
2. On Jesus the rock

Rocks are images of strength. When we describe something as an impenetrable force or an immovable object, we call it a rock. Alcatraz, the island prison in San Francisco Bay was nicknamed The Rock because it was thought to be impossible to escape from. Athletes or entertainers will use rock in their nickname if they want to promote selves as tough guys. Pickup trucks are sold as being like a rock in their commercials. When someone helps a loved one through a hard time, that loved one will refer to that person as their rock.

All of these ROCKS have one thing in common. They are not impenetrable forces or immovable objects. There were prisoners who escaped from Alcatraz. The athletes who want you to think they are tough guys get injured and their careers end. The pickup trucks get old and rust. And the person who helps a loved one through a tough time also has their emotional breaking point, and will need a rock of his own. These rocks depend on imperfect and sinful people for their strength. Sinful people are not solid rocks, we are movable stones.

In our reading today, we hear Peter give a confession that’s rock solid. He told Jesus: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. This confession of Jesus is the only impenetrable force, the only immovable object, the only thing we believe in that gives us eternal life. What makes this confession rock solid is that it’s all about Jesus and not about us. Jesus is the solid rock that builds his church out of us, the movable stones. Because of Jesus, we are able to give the same confession Peter did, the confession that Jesus commended when he said: ON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH.

We are told: When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, Who do people say the Son of Man is? Just prior to this the Pharisees and Sadducees tried to trick Jesus into showing that he was not really the Messiah. As always, Jesus gave them no evidence that he was an imposter, and he warned the disciples against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He wanted the disciples to have no doubt that he was the Son of God.

With this question Jesus was inviting the disciples to confess their faith in him as their Savior, seeking to stamp out any seeds of doubt the Pharisees and Sadducees may have planted in the minds of the disciples. Jesus wanted to prepare these twelve men for all of the things they would face after he went home to heaven. He was taking this opportunity to teach the twelve and all of us.

The disciples replied: Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Jesus asked them what people were saying and the disciples told him, but there may have been some uncertainty if any of these answers was actually the correct one. Over and over during their time with Jesus the disciples showed that they did not fully understand who Jesus really was. Their lack of understanding showed that they were not solid rocks, but movable stones.

All of these theories about Jesus picture him as a special teacher from God, but none of them portray Jesus as he really is - the Savior, the Son of God. They minimize Jesus and the work he was here to do.
We also have ways of making Jesus less than what he really is. When we make Jesus nothing more than a moral compass by asking \textit{What would Jesus do?} instead of \textit{What did Jesus do for me?} don’t we make Jesus less than what he really is? When worship and Bible study are a chore instead of a blessed opportunity to be close to our Savior, don’t we make Jesus less than what he really is? When our offerings are anything less than cheerful giving of our first fruits, don’t we make Jesus less than what he really is? When we keep the good news about Jesus to ourselves, don’t we make Jesus less than what he really is? When worry, stress, or self reliance take the place of trust in Jesus, don’t we make Jesus less than what he really is? All of these things show that we are not solid rocks, but movable stones.

But Jesus gave his disciples another opportunity to confess their faith: \textbf{But what about you? Who do you say I am?} He wanted them to show their faith. He did not ask this question for his own benefit, but for the disciples’ benefit. Faith is strengthened when faith is active, and this is a call from Jesus to action.

Jesus also calls us to confess our faith in him. He does this in spite of our sins. When we have a self-serving motivation for helping someone, but that person still praises Jesus for using us, Jesus mercifully calls us to confess him. When worship and Bible study are a chore, but our faith is still strengthened, Jesus mercifully calls us to confess him. When we fail to give our first fruits, but our offerings still provide blessings, Jesus mercifully calls us to confess him. When we fail to tell others about our Savior, but more opportunities still present themselves, Jesus mercifully calls us to confess him. When we do not trust in him but he still takes care of us, Jesus mercifully calls us to confess him. Jesus mercifully calls us to repentance for the times when we minimize him, and in doing so gives us opportunity to confess him and put our faith in action.

We know that we’re movable stones. We know that our understanding and our faith in Jesus has its ups and downs. Thank Jesus that he did not build his Church on movable stones. Thank Jesus that the Church is built on a rock solid foundation. Jesus is the solid rock.

The Holy Spirit made Peter’s faith jump to action. \textit{Simon Peter answered, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus replied, Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hades will not overcome it.} Jesus is not saying that Peter is the foundation of the Church. In the original text, the word for \textit{Peter} used here means \textit{movable or shifting stone}. Just a few verses after our text, Peter showed that when he rebuked Jesus for predicting his own death. Jesus’ reply to this rebuke was \textit{Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men}. These are not words that Jesus would use to the solid rock on which the Church would be built. Jesus was applying the law to a sinner. The holy Church could not be founded on a sinner.

The rock on which the Church is built is the confession Peter gave of Jesus as his Savior. The original text uses a word for \textit{rock} here that means \textit{bedrock} - the kind of rock that cannot be moved. This bedrock is the immovable foundation that even the gates of Hades will not overcome. The Church will last for eternity, ruled by Jesus, made up of all who have been given faith in him. Jesus is the solid rock.

Jesus loves and blesses the members of his Church. He strengthens and preserves
us with the gospel. He commands us to spread the gospel to all people. We are given the ability to train our people for works of service, both in the public ministry and as laypeople. The Church and parents are partners in raising faithful children. Even the hardships that we face for the sake of Jesus are blessings, because through them we share in the cross of Christ. The Church is the body of Christ, and like any body, each part of the body has a role to play. Thank Jesus for these roles and the ability to carry them out.

Jesus also gives the Church responsibilities to carry out for our eternal good. Right here sinners’ hearts are pierced with God’s law and then healed with the Gospel of Jesus. Right here sins are washed away in the waters of baptism. The Holy Spirit works in our midst through Word and through Lord’s Supper so that you are strengthened and kept in this saving faith until the day you die and go to heaven. Always make sure that law and gospel are preached here and let nothing separate you from these means of God’s grace.

Jesus also tells us: 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. Jesus gives us the power and authority to forgive people their sins or withhold that forgiveness. This is not to be taken lightly, but has eternal consequences. We administer these keys of the kingdom based on evidence in a person’s life of repentance and faith. We open heaven’s door - offer forgiveness - when a person is repentant. We close door – withhold forgiveness - when a person is not repentant. What an awesome responsibility we, the movable stones, have been given by Jesus, the solid rock, to forgive sins by his authority.

We are then told: Then Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. The time had not yet come for Jesus to be revealed as the Messiah. Many people at that time had the idea that the Messiah would be an earthly king who would restore the nation of Israel to the greatness it had under King David. If those people had heard the Christ had come, they may have tried to make Jesus king and disrupted the saving work he was here to do.

But Jesus has been revealed to us. We do not have the limitations the disciples did. The time for the Messiah to be revealed is now! Jesus commands us to spread the gospel to all nations now! We are to share all the blessings of the Church with those who do not know them now! The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. Christ’s mission is our mission now! Let’s carry it out to Jesus’ glory now!

The apostle Peter, me and all of you are movable stones. Thank Jesus that the Church’s one foundation is not a movable stone because we would surely wreck it. Thank Jesus for the faith to make the confession: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Thank Jesus for preserving his Church and giving us membership in it, so that this confession is proclaimed from our pulpits, our pews, in our friendly conversations, in our loving actions, and in our patience in suffering until Jesus comes again to make the Church Militant here on earth into the Church Triumphant forever in heaven. Thank Jesus that the Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord. Amen.

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