

SUN, MAY 14
9 AM & 11 AM

Who's Got
The Keys?

EASTER
SEASON



“Who’s Got the Keys?”

May 14, 2023 | 6th Sunday of Easter
Clara Thompson | Matthew 16:13-20

I’ve got a lot of keys ... the key fob to my 2009 Prius, which also has the key to our home. The key to my office at Covenant. The key card that gets me in the door at Covenant. A whole mess of keys, some of which are the keys to our family’s old summer stomping grounds in northern Michigan. I need to make a confession this morning: I no longer remember what all these keys go to. I suspect that I still have the key that used to fit the old back door at the church I served in Oregon for many years. I think I still have the key to my college dorm room. The truth of the matter is, a whole bunch of keys hooked together were always easier to find at the bottom of my purse than just a couple of keys. For years I carried all these keys with me for the practical reason of being able to find the very few that I actually needed, and because I could no longer remember which keys I didn’t need any longer.

I don’t know about your household, but at our house when our children were still at home and we would sometimes have three or four drivers in the house, with more drivers than automobiles, one of the frequently heard questions, usually spoken with some amount of exasperation, was, “Who’s got the keys?” Especially if one person in the family had a tendency to leave the keys wherever they first sat down when they came into the house, or in their pocket, on the floor, in the car, on their dresser, or the keys were accidentally kicked under their bed when they changed their clothes, sometimes it was hard to find the car keys. If you’re the next one who needs to use the car, knowing who’s got the keys is important.

Our Gospel reading for this morning is Matthew’s account of a conversation between Jesus and some of his disciples. They are in Caesarea Philippi, a beautiful place at the foot of Mount Hermon with its three peaks, nine thousand feet high. I’m not sure why Jesus and the disciples were there, except that Jesus may have been looking for a place with a little privacy. While they were there, Jesus asked for a report. ‘You fellows

have been milling around among the people. Who do they say I am? What are you picking up? What do you hear on the street?' The disciples could pretty easily answer that. 'Some say you are John the Baptist come back from the dead.' 'Yeah, I've heard that.' 'Some people say you're Jeremiah.' 'I've heard that too.' 'Some say you're Elijah. That's a pretty common view.' But then Jesus looks them in the eye and says, 'And you? What do you say? Who do you say I am?' And then follows Simon Peter's astounding confession of faith: 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

Now, up to this point in the story, the Gospel writers of Matthew, Mark and Luke all agree. This story is found in all three of what are known as the Synoptic Gospels. But then Matthew, from whom our reading comes this morning, adds something to the story of Mark and Luke. Matthew adds Jesus' blessing of Simon Peter, Peter's commission, and Jesus giving the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter. It's Matthew's addition that intrigues me, especially the part about the keys.

The keys of the kingdom of heaven. The keys that are symbolically given to Peter by our Lord are the symbol of authority to bind or to loose, to forbid or to permit. To Peter is given the responsibility of the church. "I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19). Eugene Peterson puts it this way in *The Message*: "You will have complete and free access to God's kingdom, keys to open any and every door: no more barriers between heaven and earth, earth and heaven. A yes on earth is yes in heaven. A no on earth is no in heaven." Immediately following Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah, following Peter's own personal affirmation of faith, Jesus grants to Peter authority. The giving of that authority is based on his confession of faith alone. And the keys are the symbol of that authority.

Keys of the kingdom. With those keys comes authority and responsibility. Just as when I pick up the keys to the family car, I am accepting the responsibility of driving safely and the responsibility of taking care of both the passengers and the car. Just as when I was given the keys to Covenant, it wasn't just so that I could get into the building or my office, it was also a sign of responsibility for what is inside the building, both its "things" and its people. So too when Peter was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, certain responsibilities went with the giving. "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven;" "complete and free access to God's kingdom, keys to open any and every door."

With keys comes responsibility. We teach our 16-year-olds that when they get their driver's license. When my mother gave me the keys to the family's old stomping grounds in northern Michigan, I was not only being given access, I was also being given responsibility ... to take care of things, to make repairs as needed, to enjoy the place responsibly.

I have another confession for you this morning: Sometimes I wish I could have the keys to something without having the responsibility. Having the key to Covenant means that I cannot only let myself in whenever I want, I also must remember to turn out the lights and lock the building if I'm the last one to leave; I have responsibility to help take care of everything that is here, including each of you. When our children have the key to the family car, they have the responsibility of driving safely, and not running the tank dry. Sometimes we may wish we could have the keys without having all of the responsibility, but it never works that way does it? Even if you just have a hotel room key for a night, you are responsible for the condition of that room when you leave; if something gets broken because of your irresponsibility, you will be asked to pay for its replacement. With keys comes responsibility.

Simon Peter confessed his faith in Jesus Christ and was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. You and I, every one of us who is a member of the church, has made our own public profession of faith. When you join the church, you're not asked a lot of questions. We do not ask about gender or race or financial situation. We don't ask about your background, your political leanings, or your family connections. We don't ask any of that. But we do ask a few important questions, the most important of which is this: Do you affirm Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? We ask for a public profession of faith in Jesus. We are asked the question that Jesus asked the disciples: Who do you say Jesus is? And then, upon our profession of faith, in a sense, we too are given the keys of the kingdom. Upon joining the church, we are each given the responsibility of working to build the church, to build the kingdom on earth in our own corner of the world, to be faithful witnesses for Jesus Christ in our daily lives. A second question that we ask at the time someone joins the church is this: Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his word and showing his love, and will you be a faithful member of his church? In other words, will you try to have your life, your daily living, reflect your belief in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? In a sense, when we join the church, we are given the keys, and we are asked to carry those keys with us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – not just on Sundays for an hour or two. The responsibility for the church and its witness in the world, with the help of God Almighty, rests on our shoulders. We are all responsible for caring for one another; for helping to be the

church now and in the years to come; for working to help the church be the most faithful witness it can be in the world; to be a daily witness to the One in whom we profess our faith, whether we are physically in the building at the time or representing it elsewhere. We are responsible for ministering in the name of Jesus Christ because the keys have been passed on to us.

My friends, we have been given the keys to this part of the kingdom of heaven. We have the access, the ability, the responsibility. Each and every one of us has a key. So, who will we say Jesus is? And what sort of testimony will we offer about him through our words, through our deeds, and by our lives? Who's got the keys? You do, and I do. We can't leave them in our pockets or kick them under the bed when it's inconvenient or unpopular to bear witness to Jesus Christ. The keys have been given to us. Now let's take them out of our pockets and use them for the glory of God, each and every day, each in our own way. Amen.