

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Quincy, IL  
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 13  
Saturday, August 26, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday, August 27, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

# “God’s Ways are Inscrutable”

Matthew 16:13-20

But what about you? “Who do you say that I am?” This is the challenge God places before everyone. What do you believe, teach, and confess? The need to answer the question becomes a problem for those who desire to have a superficial relationship with God or a long-distance relationship with God.

God has revealed to us who He is. Even though His judgments are unsearchable and His ways are “inscrutable.” We had been using that line from our Epistle reading as our Gradual for the first portion of the Season of Pentecost. His ways are inscrutable. What a wonderful word. You probably won’t ever use it in Scrabble, but it is a rich word meaning “mysterious,” or more appropriately “not to be understood.”

Yet, even though we are incapable of understanding the mind of the Lord or telling Him anything that He doesn’t already know; even though we are poor miserable creatures corrupted with sin, God has chosen to reveal Himself to us through His Holy Word.

And it is this Word of God that teaches us what we need to know about our Lord. It certainly doesn’t teach us everything we want to know about Him, but my guess is that God has kept certain aspects of Himself hidden so as to spare us the terror of being confronted with the full majesty of His Being. As the hymn writer prays, “Come not in terrors, as the King of Kings, But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings.”

Now I know there are those who say that this is a mistake on God's part. They say, if He did reveal Himself fully and completely to us so that we could fully know Him, if He did repeatedly dazzle the people of this world with mighty acts of power, and not just storms and earthquakes, but supernatural miracles which are easily attributed to the hand of God; then, oh, how the people all over the world would rally to the side of the Lord.

Do you really think that is true? I don't, and history proves that it would not work. We look to the Old Testament concerning what God did to rescue His people from slavery in Egypt.

Exactly how effective were God's miracles of judgment at softening up Pharaoh's heart? Oh, I know, the protests are made, "Pastor, that doesn't prove a thing. Scripture says that it was God who hardened Pharaoh's heart." To that I say, "Fine. I'll give you that. But then what effect did God's miracles have on other people. Let's take a look at the Israelites who witnessed the same events as did Pharaoh. Certainly God did not harden their hearts toward Him. But He repeatedly sought their love and devotion. Did they rally to the side of their Lord and remain faithful to Him after witnessing such an awesome display?"

I think not. We know how the story goes. During the plagues on Egypt, even though the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived, was spared, they complained to Moses because Pharaoh was being tough on them. They knew of the frogs, and flies, and boils, and hail, and the Nile turning to blood, but they still feared a man, Pharaoh, more than they feared God. There is a reason Jesus so adamantly taught that we are not to fear the one who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul, but rather fear the One who can kill both soul and body in hell.

Then when the Lord brings the Israelites out of Egypt to the shore of the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army approaches, what do the Israelites say? They

practically curse God bemoaning that the Lord had Moses bring them out in the desert to be killed. And they longed to return as Pharaoh's slaves.

After the Lord demonstrates His awesome power again, and brings them safely through the waters of the Red Sea (as an aside, I have been researching the phenomena of the standing wave, called a seiche, where the wind causes the waters to pile up for hours or even days and expose the lake bed. Lake Erie, in particular, is famous for such phenomena happening.)

Nevertheless, it is God who causes the phenomena and brings His people safely to the other side and the waters swallow up Pharaoh's army. And did they give thanks to the Lord and praise His holy Name? Of course they did, until three days later when they came to Marah, a place with bitter tasting water. And they grumbled against the Lord, because the water was not to their taste.

From there, they set out across the desert, and they again grumbled against the Lord because they didn't have meat to eat. Once again, they said they would have been better off back in Egypt. They remembered the "pots of meat" and other foods. "Oh, the good old days – of slavery."

When they get to the Promised Land, they choose not to go in. They fear the people who live in the land of Canaan. Once again, they fear man more than they fear God. This is the pattern throughout the Old Testament. God performs mighty acts of judgment and salvation, and if the people repent and serve Him with faithful hearts, their faithfulness is short-lived.

Nothing changed in the New Testament. Christ our Lord was rejected also. Many miracles were seen by the people, but faith was short-lived. Even the disciples all fell away and deserted Him in His greatest hour of need.

Greater saints than we have struggled with their faith. Moses' brother Aaron succumbed to the pressure from the people and made the golden calf.

Peter, even though he knew and confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, doubted Him while he walked on the water and denied Jesus three times while Jesus was on trial.

Your life of faith is nothing short of a miracle. As with Peter, so it is with you also; when you confess your faith, it is not anything that has been revealed to you by man. This is the work of God in your life.

You are not Christian people because you are better, smarter, or prettier than anyone else. You are God's dear children because He chose you. He rescued you from your slavery to sin by casting judgment on His own Son and inflicting pain and misery on Him – ultimately death as payment must be made for the guilt of your sins so as to redeem you out of slavery. And the wages of sin is death.

He brought you through the waters of Baptism. He rescues you from your enemies. He made your body to be the temple of His Holy Spirit. He wants you to be near Him. This is not a long distance relationship. His ways are inscrutable. As Paul says, "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" We have no way of fully knowing Him or understanding Him. But we need to be prepared to confess Him – to confess our faith and answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?"

It is important to have a good answer. When the water of life is bitter tasting; when the pressures of work and home become Satan's tool to drive a wedge between you and Christ; it is eternally important to be prepared to confess our faith and answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" Amen.