

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 12/3/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

In Mathew 16, we hear the story of Jesus giving the nickname of “Peter” to Simon, the son of Jonah. Peter, or “Petros” in the Greek, translates to “rock” and Jesus says, “on this rock I will build My church.” The Roman Catholic Church has interpreted this passage to be Jesus’ appointment of Peter as the first pope. I think, however, that the “rock” on which Jesus says He will build His church is not Simon himself, but Simon’s confession that immediately precedes this renaming, that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” It is upon the foundation of Peter’s faith, and that of the other disciples, and ours, that Jesus builds His Church throughout history.

It is also on the basis of this faith, then and now, that Jesus gives to His followers the following instructions: *“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.”* The binding and loosing of sin are literally the keys to heaven. The terms have to do with forgiving or not the sins of another. Jesus is saying that if we choose not to forgive others, they are bound to those sins and must carry those sins with them when they come before Jesus at the end of time. If we choose to forgive, or to loose them from their sins, they are free forever of those sins before God.

There is a phrase that some people use without realizing how it relates to this same thing. The expression, “God damn,” means “may God curse you forever,” or “may you be condemned to hell for eternity.” Sometimes the phrase is used with regard to things that frustrate us, but sometimes it is spoken with regard to another. Usually, this is done without understanding what is really being said. But it actually means, “I wish you to hell forever.”

As people of faith, we have power from God. We can bind or we can set loose. We can hold someone in sin or liberate them. All of us would do well to first consider how we would feel if someone chose not to forgive us or spoke words of condemnation against us. This may give us a different perspective when it comes to considering those who have sinned against us.

Whether it was intentional or not, we have the power to hold them in sin or to say, “I let you go.” Freeing another from sin is one of the greatest gifts we can offer. It also can release us from the burden of a damaged relationship. It is a difficult thing to go to someone and say, not just “I’m sorry,” but “Please forgive me.” What joy and relief there must be to hear the words of one we have injured who says to us, “I forgive you. You are free. I let you go.”

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey