

## SERMON “BUILT ON THE ROCK”

(Matthew 16:13-20 Preached at MPC on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017) (Show slides of eclipse)

Last Monday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017, many of us and the world witnessed as sections of the states spanning from west to east—sections of these states were in the scientific description of the phrase “path of totality” of a total solar eclipse.

When I first heard that phrase on the news I thought, “That will preach.” You see the first thought that popped into my brain when I saw the eclipse later on the TV program called NOVA, was to shout hallelujah and giving God all the praise for orchestrating such a significant and powerful scene for everyone to witness his glory and power.

Hebrews 1:3 tells us of God speaking of his Son Jesus in v. 3, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” We affirm this powerful word of scripture both in direct support of the church doctrine of creation, and when we all read together earlier as a confessional church the Apostle’s Creed which begins, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.”

Scientists say that a total solar eclipse show us the areas around the sun where all the critical action happens. It is in this area called the corona, where the sun produces "solar weather" phenomena, like solar flares or coronal mass ejections, and the region is also where solar winds or material constantly blowing off the surface of the sun are accelerated.

These phenomena are important to understand because they have an impact on the rest of the solar system, including earth. Solar weather and eruptions can affect all satellites, and can create hazardous radiation for astronauts in space. Just as God created and orchestrated this special alignment of the moon—a planet 400 times smaller than the sun to block out it’s light— let’s keep this phrase “The path of totality” in the context of this message and how it impacts the church of Jesus Christ. For those who missed this total solar eclipse, the next one will cross Mexico, Canada, and the US in just 7 years—so stand by!

We know the church gets lots of bad press when it gets any press at all. People like to be critical of the church. Hollywood and the news media seem to delight in showing the church in a bad light, but they are not alone. Lots of people say, "I won't go to church because the church is full of hypocrites." That's an interesting thought I'd like to explore for just a moment.

In this modern age, we have tended to reduce the notion of hypocrisy to duplicity. The modern notion is that a hypocrite is someone who says one thing but does another, a person who is two-faced, who is inconsistent or phony. But Jesus' teaching on hypocrisy does not exclude this notion but goes much deeper.

The Biblical understanding and teaching by Jesus is rooted in the original meaning of the Greek word ὑποκριταί (hypokritai) which means "stage actors." On one level, it is easy to see how this word has come to mean someone who is phony. For what they claim to be, they really are not, they are just acting a role. But when no one is looking (i.e. the audience is gone) they revert back to their true self, which is someone quite different.

In effect Jesus describes hypocrisy as the sad state of a person who reduces himself to being an actor on a stage, because he does not know God the Father. There are many people who live their lives in a desperate search for human approval and applause. They discern their dignity and worth, not from God, (who is in effect a stranger to them), but from what other human beings think of them. **So, at the heart of hypocrisy, Jesus teaches the goal of such a person is to be seen by God the Father!**

Many young people succumb to peer pressure, will engage in dangerous and unhealthy practices to win approval. Some will drop out of school, join gangs and commit crimes. Others will drink heavily or use drugs. Still others will tattoo and pierce their bodies, engage in sexual activity before marriage, and do many risky things. The need for approval is often the deep drive that underlies this desperate behavior. But like actors on a stage seeking applause they rush to fill these rolls and wait for the applause and acceptance.

Many adults too will often compromise core principles to fit in and be liked, gain promotions or earn access into certain groups. Christians will hide their faith, playing the role of a secular modern to win approval. Some will act deceitfully to please a boss, others will gossip or engage in any number of sinful behaviors to ingratiate themselves

to a group. Why does this happen to a person? Here too Jesus is rather clear. This happens to a person who does not know God the Father. They may know ABOUT God, but they do not personally know God or his love for them through the gift of God's grace and sacrifice of God's Son Jesus on the cross.

God is at best a benevolent stranger who runs the universe but he is in some remote heaven and the interaction that many have with him is vague and abstract. God exists but he is on the periphery of life. In effect, he is a stranger. I John 2:23 says, "No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also." Just like in a total solar eclipse, if we are not seen by God through God's Son Jesus Christ, the light of the world, we will be blocked out by the darkness of evil in the path of totality and destruction!

Hypocrisy! Jesus knows and understands what that really means—He doesn't feel that way about the church! Jesus loves the church! Jesus loves us—we are the church! Jesus also knows that we are not perfect? Jesus knows that our pews are full of sinful people, but he loves us anyway. Jesus came as a physician to the spiritually sick. That's who we are! Jesus is what we need—a physician.

That's why Christ created the church! Christ is the physician and, if I may stretch the metaphor a bit, the church is the hospital and we are the patients. We come here, not because we're well, but because we're in need of healing. As Christ heals us, he calls us to reach out to others who need healing. He calls us to invite them to meet the Great Physician who is healing us and who can heal them. Christ loves us individually. He knows our name. He sees us, knows our face. He knows every hair on our head. And He loves us as we gather in His name as the church.

The love of Christ for his church comes through in our text today. He asked the disciples who they thought he was, and Peter answered: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered Peter: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven."

Sadly, Catholics and Protestants have divided sharply in their interpretation of these words. Catholics understand them to establish Peter as the rock upon which Jesus will build his church. They also understand Peter to have been the first Bishop of Rome and the first of an unbroken succession of Popes. But a traditional Protestant interpretation is that the rock is Peter's confession and the reality that stands behind it—that Jesus is the Christ, the Rock, the Son of the living God.

But Christ says, "I will build my church." Did you hear that? Who built it? Christ built it! Whose, is it? Christ's church! Where did he build it? On a rock, Himself! Rocks are solid. The word rock conveys a sense of strength. One of the life insurance companies has as their symbol the Rock of Gibraltar. They say, "Get a piece of the rock!" Why would an insurance company use a rock as their symbol? They want you to believe that they are strong, immovable—that they will always be there for you. We say, "Rock-solid" when we mean indestructible—immovable. The church is "built on the rock"—rock-solid in Jesus Christ.

As we move through the process of perhaps becoming a more purpose driven church in certain areas, we need to check our alignment with God's purposes to make sure we are NOT in the dark "path of totality"—NOT in the path of darkness and Satan's evil forces—but we must always remain in the eclipse of God's everlasting light and love of Christ our Lord!

Jesus has a specific purpose in mind as the builder and head of the Church. Pastor Rick Warren says, "It isn't our job to create the purposes of the church but to discover them." Jesus founded the church, died for the church, sent the Holy Spirit to lead and guide the church and will return someday for his "bride" the church of Jesus Christ. As the owner of the church Christ has already established the purposes for His church and they are not negotiable.

Our duty is to understand what these purposes are and to implement them. God gives us the freedom to be innovative with the style of ministry but never alter the substance of it. Pastor Rick invites us to focus on the both the nature and tasks of the church—everyone who attended our retreat were asked 4 questions based on the video they saw by Pastor Rick.

These questions were 1) Why does the church exist? 2) Which of the 5 New Testament purposes has our church tended to emphasize the most and why? 3) Which of the 5

purposes has our church tended to emphasize least and why? 4) What do believe is keeping our church from growing spiritually and in size and why? Great questions to ponder over as we try to evaluate and make that move to be a purposeful God eclipsed church of Christ.

We like to think of the church as a quiet, restful place where we go to be reinvigorated—a place where we can lay aside our troubles. There is a sense in which that is true. There is also a sense in which the church is a battleground—a place where we engage in mortal combat with the powers of evil, death and the enemy. The temptation is to forget that we, the church, are an army engaged in combat. The temptation is to be distracted by our neighbor's warts and to be drawn into the war zone with him or her. The world and the church are always tempted to tear itself apart with shouts of hypocrisy and critical judgment on the way to the battleground. How can we avoid that? Perhaps a story might be instructive.

Karl Barth was one of the great theologians of the 20th century. Bela Vasaday, a Hungarian theologian, tells about the time he ushered Barth into a Hungarian restaurant. A gypsy band was playing, and Barth seemed entranced by the music. Vasaday was surprised, because he knew Barth loved classical music. It seemed out of character that he would be so distracted by this little gypsy band.

Vasaday was with Barth a dozen years later in Hungary, where Barth was lecturing. He was surprised to hear Barth comment about that little, nondescript, gypsy band from so many years ago. Barth said: "Look and listen, a really edifying spectacle that I cannot admire enough here in Hungary—how in a gypsy band every individual player had his ears and eyes glued on the leading fiddler—concentrating absolutely on the leader's improvisations—therefore playing inevitably and happily with all the others!

"So, it is in the real Church where we are confronted by a common task and dedicated to a common purpose and mission and are invited—without any moralizing on the subject, to be mutually responsible for one another, to bear one another's burdens. "The real Church lives by and ruled by Christ our Lord and by Him alone. It does not live according to its own discretion; neither does it live on its own responsibility and at its own risk."

Friends, when we do that—when we keep our eyes on Jesus—when we follow his direction and purposes—we become the purpose driven church Christ has created us to be—Christ's creation—built on the rock—a rock stronger than the power of evil—a rock more enduring than the power of death—all the while, holding in our hands, the precious keys of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ, all through the power of the Holy Spirit!  
Amen!