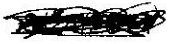


ST DAVIDS  
AUG 23 2026

(Proper 16) A

Isaiah 51:1-6; Psalm 138; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 16:13-20

by the Rev'd Hugh Tudor-Foley



Simon Peter replied, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father, in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

These verses are among the three most studied, debated, and disputed verses in the New Testament. Historically, they have been central to issues of authority in the church, especially of the authority of the episcopacy

and of the Bishop of Rome. But as important as this hardy perennial of a theological <sup>QUESTION</sup> ~~conundrum~~ is, it isn't the issue that seems the most important to talk about today.

Instead, let's consider what this story says about Peter, and about us.

It all begins when Peter becomes the first person to make the great Christian Confession of faith. He names Jesus as the Messiah, the hope of Israel, the son of the one who created heaven and earth. Before Peter sees this, the Gospels say that the demons knew who Jesus was and God knew who Jesus was. <sup>AND—</sup> Now, Jesus is beginning to be known by people—and something new is happening, something new is

being built—by the will of God, and by the power of God.

Notice the very first thing that happens—Simon is given a new name.

And “Peter” really is a new name—there is absolutely no record of anyone using Petros, the Greek word that means “rock,” or “Cephas,” the same word in Aramaic, as a proper name before this event.

So, in spite of movies to the contrary, Peter <sup>BECAME</sup> really ~~was~~ Rocky I, <sup>1st</sup> the first person to have that name. Remember that names and naming were very important in the Hebrew mind—a name was the summary of the existence of the thing <sup>OR PERSON</sup> named. To change a person's name—as God

changed Abram's name to Abraham, and Jacob's name to Israel—was to alter fundamentally that person's identity, relationships, and mission. To give a person his or her name was, in some way, to shape their destiny.

It still works that way <sup>CERTAINLY</sup> to confess Jesus as the Christ is to be changed, it is to be given, by him, a new name—it is to be given identity and mission in relationship to Jesus. That was acted out visibly with Peter—it continues to be true among us. The service of Baptism in our Prayer Book is probably the finest such service the church has used for 1,500 years. But there is one part of the old service, the service in the

1928 Prayer Book, that seems even more appropriate. That was where, immediately before the Baptism itself, the sponsors were asked to "name this child." <sup>SOME OF US REMEMBER</sup> (Remember that? [BCP, 1928, p. 279]) This made great and wonderful good sense. When it comes to our true identity, the name of every Christian, like Peter's name, is given in Baptism as a response to the gift of faith. That's why our first name is also called our "Christian name."

And part of our name, part of the identity we receive from the Lord, is the same as Peter's. ~~He is Rocky~~<sup>1</sup>, the first rock of the edifice the Lord (not Peter, but the Lord) is building. That structure is the church. Peter is

the first stone of a building, the first called for the new Israel, the first named for a great task. Upon him and the other Apostles, upon their faith and upon their person, Christ builds his church. And so the Lord continues to build it.

We are, in this respect, like movie sequels. You are <sup>PETER</sup>~~Rocky~~ 5 billion, or whatever—same director, same plot, larger cast. We continue to be called to be who Peter was called to be. Through us, and by us, Christ continues to build his church. Through us, Christ continues to be present to his world.

This church that the Lord began with Peter, and that we are a part of, is a holy and a sacred thing. It is not merely or mainly a

voluntary association of like-minded people; it is not primarily or at its heart a human institution. It is instead a divine mystery, a holy thing, much greater than we can see or imagine—stronger even than death itself, vast in space and time. It is built of stones, or rocks; and these stones are laid one atop the other. They touch, so the building is a single structure that continues through space and time. That continuity is a continuity of Christ's presence, a continuity of faith, a continuity of tradition and doctrine, and a continuity of persons—each connected to those who went before.

That continuity is important. We call it  
“Apostolicity.” It is one of the four marks of the  
church ~~in~~ in the Nicene Creed we say that the  
church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

This continuity of doctrine, faith, and persons  
is the apostolic part. The Apostolic Succession  
of our bishops—the fact that our bishops are  
part of a virtually unbroken line beginning with  
Peter and the others <sup>AS ARE WE CLERGY</sup>—is one important part of  
this Apostolicity—it is one important way we  
are connected to the Apostles and the early  
church. But Apostolicity also means that the  
rocks are laid one on top of the other. Each  
new name, each new rock, builds on something  
unbroken and continuous. Jesus says to each

of us, you are Peter, ~~you are Rocky, Rocky~~ 5 billion—or whatever.

Fr. Herbert O'Driscoll uses a wonderful image for this. And it fits with something I shared a bit ago. His idea is to look at all of the last 200 centuries as rings of time, as concentric circles of time, scores and scores of such circles, we are in the very outermost circle, farthest away from the center—and at the center is a Cross. We are brought into the circle, into the faith, in large part because somewhere, somehow, someone in the circle just before ours took us by the hand and said, “come,” and so drew us in. That is one very important reason why we are here. That person

was able to do this for us because someone had taken him or her by the hand and had drawn that person in.

And so on, through all the centuries, hands are held through all of those circles. Until we reach the place where a very few of those hands were held by hands touched by the mark of nails. So we hold hands touched by nails.

In this way, Christ builds his church; such is the gift we have been given.

What Jesus is stressing in these words of Peter is continuity—the historical and spiritual reality that the church Jesus is creating is his—his alone. No one can create another church.

~~Christ's church can be built on no other foundation, with no other living stones than those he names, and with no other cornerstone and chief builder than Christ himself. We~~  
constantly re-live this Gospel story. As we say to Jesus, "you are the Christ," he says to us—to each of us—"you, too, are Peter, you too, are a rock, and with you, also, I am building my church." What happened to Peter continues and it includes us.

One more thing: Jesus called Peter blessed, fortunate, happy. Remember what that blessedness looked like. Remember Peter's life of poverty and struggle, of pain and of conflict and, finally, of a martyr's death. That's what

Jesus meant by blessed. To be given a new name by Jesus, to have a Christian name, this always includes being named as servant, as minister, as one who gives one's self, and so becomes a gift to the world in the name of Christ. To be chosen, to be called, to be named as part of the glorious company of Christ's church, to be another <sup>PETER</sup>~~Rocky~~, this is never done as a sign of privilege, but always as a mark for service; never for ourselves alone, but always for others.

So we are named—we are named rock—part of Christ's church—and we are named servant, gift to the world. In that way, we are named as Christ's own—forever.