



*Great Moments Are Born of Great Opportunities: Part 1*

*Matthew 16:13-20*

*Sunday, August 23rd, 2020*

*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

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*Text: 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."*

"Great moments are born of great opportunities."

So said the United States hockey coach Herb Brooks in the movie "Miracle On Ice", the story of the 1980 Olympic team that pulled the upset of the century when they held the Soviet team scoreless on the way to winning the gold medal.

Great moments are born of great opportunities.

Our gospel lesson is about such a time.

Jesus is nearing the end of his earthly ministry. He is about to "pass the baton" of his ministry to the disciples.

"Who do people say that I am?" he asked.

"John the Baptist returned from the dead"--the conspiracy theorists probably didn't think that John was ever beheaded.

"Elijah", "Jeremiah", (not the bullfrog), "some other prophet."

"So who do you say that I am?" That is the most important question. It is the question that each one of us asks. It is the first question that seven confirmands will answer later this morning.

"You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

Peter did not come to this conclusion by the process of deduction, but by revelation, God's revelation.

How we identify who Jesus is affects every aspect of our lives including our values and our decisions.

If we say that Jesus is Lord, that means that we acknowledge that we do not belong to ourselves but that we belong to a Higher Power, a Higher Force.

You do not belong to yourselves but to God for you were bought with a price. (I Corinthians 6:19 & 20, Good New Bible)

God chooses the right people, at the right time and gives them the right vision and the right understanding.

The Right People. God chooses people like Peter and you and me, people who are not perfect, people with warts and flaws, people who stumble and fall and get back up again, people who are humble enough to know that they do not deserve the blessings that they receive.

The Right Time. Jesus was about to end his earthly ministry. His disciples had walked with him, ate with him, and learned from him.

In life there always comes a time of transition, of change, of a page being turned and a new chapter written by a new generation.

One generation does the best that they can but then there comes a time to launch a new generation.

My freshman year of college was not a good year academically. I had too many distractions along with not really knowing how to study (school had always been easy up to that point), not having good financial sense, playing it safe, and not having the academic background to excel at my university.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, my parents had a discussion about whether or not I should return to my alma mater for the second year. The discussion came to an end when my father said to my mother, "We raised him to the best of our ability. He has to find his footing. We have to trust him."

I did find my footing but that first year was a doozy.

The Right Vision. The church is unlike any other organization because only the Church can claim to be "the body of Christ" on earth. It is not by accident that many of the nation and world's outstanding medical and educational institutions were planted by Christian communities. We are called to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the imprisoned.

When we forget who we are and why we exist, we atrophy and eventually become a memorial to the past before passing away.

When we ignore God's claim upon our lives, we die spiritually. In the words of the Harry Potter books, the Dementors of this world suck out our souls leaving us soulless lobotomized creatures that can only be pitied.

God has given us a vision and a mission: namely, to make disciples by baptizing and teaching all that the Risen Lord taught us.

When we understand who we are and what we are called to be, we become solid rock upon which the Kingdom of God can be built.

"You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church," Jesus said.

Jesus gave the keys to the Kingdom to his Church. The keys are not about unlocking the pearly gates, of deciding who's in and who's out.

It is about teaching in the name of Jesus, of sharing his love and joy and truth and grace.

It is about not only proclaiming the good news of the gospel but being the good news.

"Great moments are born from great opportunity."

Imperfect though we are, Covid-19 has given us the great opportunity to remember who we are, to get our bearings, to get back to basics, to reevaluate and reclaim our purpose and to rededicate ourselves to proclaiming and working toward living into our baptism vows.

To God be the glory. Amen.