

So this morning's Gospel from Matthew has one line that has been contested since the beginning of Christianity. It is found only here in Matthew's gospel. After Peter confesses that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus is quoted as saying, "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." (Matt 16:17-18) From this one verse came the theology of the Primacy of Peter. The word for rock in Greek that is said here by Jesus to Peter also means the pebble that irritates, according to one of my friends who is a N.T. scholar. It is like the pebble that gets into your shoe. Following the actions and words of Peter throughout the gospels this seems to fit! Let's remember that Matthew's Gospel is concerned with reflecting the Hebrew Scriptures, to show the Jews that Christianity is part of Judaism. Turning to Isaiah 51, we find that Abram had his name changed by God to Abraham and Isaiah says, "Look to the rock from which you were hewn . . . Look to Abraham your father." (Is. 51: 1b-2) So as Abraham is the rock, so Peter stands as the rock. Matthew may have been comparing the Temple, which was built on the rock that was considered the center of the world and the founding of the church. BTW, this particular Greek word for 'church' is found only here and in verse 18:17 in all the Gospels. The church is built on the testimony of Peter in Matthew's Gospel; we are to be irritants to the cultural norms as the church works for justice and dignity for all people. As people came to Christ through the actions and words of the first disciples, so we today demonstrate our belief in Christ as the Son of God through working for justice and respecting the dignity of every human being. The church is called to continue the work of Jesus Christ, to show, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ's love in the world. How do we do this? According to Paul, "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another." (Romans 12:4-5) At Good Samaritan we are one body with members who differ in function. Paul writes that, "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." (Romans 12: 6) Being church is a gift from Christ. He has drawn us together in this place at this time. We are to proclaim Christ's love to each other and the world. We have gifts that differ, but we each show the love, the peace of Christ to each other here each Sunday as we come together to be nourished by our Lord and then sent back out into the world. Richard gives everyone who walks in our doors a hug; Justin shows forth his joy through his movements during the offertory while we sing. Michael radiates joy as he stands during the hymns making music. Carol helps us lift our praise to God through her music leadership. When we lay on hands on each other for healing we are sharing Christ's love. We are each called to be the person that we were created to be. To use the talents that God has given each of us. Nelson Mandela wrote: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented & fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?"

You are a child of God. . . We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.”

Each of us is called to manifest the glory of God in our world, each of us sitting here this morning. We sin when we fail to acknowledge our own gifts and are envious or compare our talents with others abilities.

There was once a stone cutter who was dissatisfied with himself and with his position in life.

One day he passed a wealthy merchant’s house. Through the open gateway, he saw many fine possessions and important visitors. “How powerful that merchant must be!” thought the stone cutter. He became very envious and wished that he could be like the merchant.

To his great surprise, he suddenly became the merchant, enjoying more luxuries and power than he had ever imagined, but envied and detested by those less wealthy than himself. Soon a high official passed by, carried in a sedan chair, accompanied by attendants and escorted by soldiers beating gongs. Everyone, no matter how wealthy, had to bow low before the procession. “How powerful that official is!” he thought. “I wish that I could be a high official!”

Then he became the high official, carried everywhere in his embroidered sedan chair, feared and hated by the people all around. It was a hot summer day, so the official felt very uncomfortable in the sticky sedan chair. He looked up at the sun. It shone proudly in the sky, unaffected by his presence. “How powerful the sun is!” he thought. “I wish that I could be the sun!”

Then he became the sun, shining fiercely down on everyone, scorching the fields, cursed by the farmers and laborers. But a huge black cloud moved between him and the earth, so that his light could no longer shine on everything below. “How powerful that storm cloud is!” he thought. “I wish that I could be a cloud!”

Then he became the cloud, flooding the fields and villages, shouted at by everyone. But soon he found that he was being pushed away by some great force, and realized that it was the wind. “How powerful it is!” he thought. “I wish that I could be the wind!”

Then he became the wind, blowing tiles off the roofs of houses, uprooting trees, feared and hated by all below him. But after a while, he ran up against something that would not move, no matter how forcefully he blew against it – a huge, towering rock. “How powerful that rock is!” he thought. “I wish that I could be a rock!”

Then he became the rock, more powerful than anything else on earth. But as he stood there, he heard the sound of a hammer pounding a chisel into the hard surface, and felt himself being changed. “What could be more powerful than I, the rock?” he thought.

He looked down and saw far below him the figure of a stone cutter.

Be the person that God created you to be, with power that you can't imagine.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, we are Good Samaritan, Christ's church in this place and time. Our foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord and to one hope we press, with every grace bestowed upon us, as we proclaim by word and example the Good News of Christ our Lord.