

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, August 27th, 2023
Rev. Gerry Gallant

The Question
Proper 16
Matthew 16:13-20

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

With all our hearts, let us praise the Lord.
 With all that we are, we will praise God's holy name!

With all our hearts, let us bless the Lord.
 We will never forget how kind God has been.

The Lord forgives our sins, heals our weakness, and gives us life everlasting.
 Let us worship God who is merciful and patient, God's love never fails.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

O God, our strength and refuge,
 We come together to worship you and praise your loving kindness.
 In your presence, we rest from what distracts us,
 to focus on your truth and goodness.
 You call us to live in relationship with you.
 Through the love of Jesus Christ, you repair our lives.
 Through the power of your Spirit, you engage us to serve you in the world.
 Receive our prayers and our praise this day,
 Creator, Christ, and Spirit,
 revive our hope and our energy
 and make us ready to answer your call. Amen.

Opening Hymn #479: "The Church is One Foundation" (V 1,2,4,5)

The church's one foundation
 is Jesus Christ our Lord;
 we are his new creation
 by water and the word;
 from heaven he came and sought us
 that we might ever be

his living servant people,
by his own death set free.

Called forth from every nation,
yet one o'er all the earth,
our charter of salvation,
one Lord, one faith, one birth,
one holy name professing
and at one table fed,
to one hope we are pressing,
by Christ's own Spirit led.

'Mid toil and tribulation,
and tumult of our war,
we wait the consummation
of peace forevermore;
till with the vision glorious
our longing eyes are blest,
and the great church victorious
shall be the church at rest.

We now on earth have union
with God the ThreeinOne,
and share, through faith, communion
with those whose rest is won,
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
like them, the meek and lowly,
on high may dwell with thee.

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

O God, our judge and our hope,
we confess we often turn away from your truth,
and ignore your call to do justice.
Forgive us when we say one thing in worship
but do another in the ways we live.
Forgive us when we ignore how others are treated
and think only of ourselves.
Let your judgment awaken us and your mercy refresh us.

Assurance of Pardon

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
 slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
 Believe the good news of the Gospel.
 In Christ, God has offered us mercy and love.
 Receive God's forgiveness this day
 and share it with each other for Christ's sake.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
 Forever and ever. Amen.**

Responsive Reading

Romans 12:1-8

12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. **4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,**

5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Children's Hymn: "This Little Light of Mine"

This little light of mine,
 I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine,
let it shine,
let it shine.

Glory halleluia,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Glory halleluia,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Glory halleluia,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine,
let it shine,
let it shine.

All around the church,
I'm gonna let it shine.
All around the church,
I'm gonna let it shine.
All around the church,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine,
let it shine,
let it shine.

Glory halleluia,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Glory halleluia,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Glory halleluia,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine,
let it shine,
let it shine.

Everywhere I go,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Everywhere I go,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Everywhere I go,
I'm gonna let it shine.

Let it shine,
let it shine,
let it shine.

Glory halleluia,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Glory halleluia,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Glory halleluia,
I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine,
let it shine,
let it shine.
Let it shine,
let it shine,
let it shine.

Children's Lesson

Prayer for illumination **(Congregant Prepared)**

Scripture

Matthew 16:13-20

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Sermon

Today we are going to study a foundational piece of Scripture for both the Roman Catholic Church and the Universal Catholic Church. In the verses from Matthew that we read today, we find the very first time that the church is mentioned, and that Peter is the rock upon which Christ will build the church, or at least that is what it seems to say.

To better understand what is happening here we once again need to look at the Scripture in context. Jesus has been travelling with the disciples for close to two and a half years at this point. As they walked alongside the Messiah the disciples witnessed many of the miracles that he has performed, they have heard his public teachings and during meals with him shared some private teachings as well.

Jesus has become well known throughout the land and many gather wherever he goes seeking out his healings, his blessings, and his teachings. For this reason, Jesus brings his disciples someplace new, the region of Caesarea Phillipi, away from the crowds, away from the religious and spiritual leaders of the time, away from the leaders of the temples and synagogues that opposed the message that Jesus was sharing.

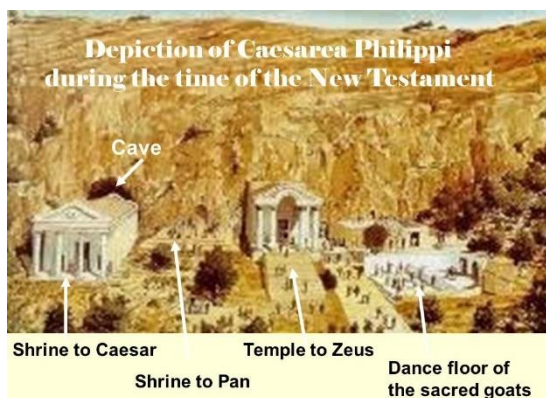
Caesarea Phillipi is a special place, and to get a clearer understanding of the intention of this Scripture we need to know a little more about Caesarea Phillipi.



First of all, it is the headwater of the Jordan River. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded in his books that there was a large cave located here from which the Jordan river originated. The Jordan was known by the Jews as the river that brings life to all the land of Israel. For this reason, the people of Israel believed that without the blessings of this river their lands would be dry and barren desert. The river started at Caesarea

Phillipi, wound its way down to the Sea of Galilee and then eventually into the Dead Sea, where it terminates and evaporates into a truly lifeless water. The Jews saw the river Jordan as the living water that brought them the blessings of life and abundance and as you can imagine it made Caesarea Phillipi a very special place for them.

What makes this place even more interesting is that it was not just special to the Jews. Caesarea Phillipi was special to almost every tribe and nation that lived in the region for various reasons.



It was not just the source of the Jordan River; it was also the place where many of the tribes and nations in the region had built temples and shrines to their pagan Gods. Located within Caesarea Phillipi were temples to Baal, to the false god Pan, the Romans had built a shrine to worship Caesar Augustus as well as smaller temples and shrines which were devoted to many of the false idols that were worshiped in the region. This place was special to the Jews, but also to everyone else in the region. Caesarea Phillipi was a place of worship.

Jesus had brought the disciples from the sea of Galilee, along the Jordan river, the living waters to a place of worship and importance to not just the people of Israel, but also to the Romans, the Greeks and in fact all the gentiles. The place that many of the Jews believed brought them life itself. Jesus brought his disciples to this place to ask them two very simple questions.

The two questions that Jesus asks are very different from one another.

The first question is simple, there is no right or wrong answer, no grade attached to it and truthfully it has very little importance in this world.

The second question is a pass/fail question. There is only one correct answer, and it is the most important question that anyone will ever answer in their lives.

Let's begin with that first question.

Matthew 16:13-14

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

This is a question that no one can get wrong because it is about who other people, other nations and other tribes believe that Jesus Christ is. The truth is that this question can be answered in many ways. Jesus Christ can mean a multitude of different things to different people. Jesus is asking this question, knowing that there was a wide variety of opinions about who he was and what he was doing among the people of the time.

This was not a question that was meant to test the disciples. Instead, it is a question that is asked to bring into focus the importance of recognizing the difference between the wide array of beliefs around who Jesus is and the clarity of the answer to the second question that they will be asked.

The answer that the disciples give is most interesting. The disciples share that Jesus is known to some to be John the Baptist, still others know him to be the prophet Elijah, and there are even some who believe that he could be Jeremiah or maybe even some other prophet. To many of us this may seem to be a silly response, but there is good reason for many people at that time to hold these beliefs.

Many believed Jesus to be John the Baptist because of Herod Antipas. After Herod Antipas had ordered John to be beheaded, he began to hear stories of Jesus. He heard about the miracles, the healings and most importantly the teachings. If you recall John was beheaded for teaching about the sin of Herod's marriage and Herod believed that John the Baptist, had been brought back from the dead by God to haunt him for his wrongful execution of the prophet.

Some believed that Jesus was Elijah, a prophet who had died nearly nine hundred years earlier. They believed this because of an Old Testament prophecy.

Malachi 4:5-6

⁵ “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Many faithful Jews believed and in fact still believe that Elijah must return before the Messiah comes. For this reason, it is still Jewish custom to this day to leave an empty seat at the table during Passover, just in case Elijah were to return. Jews all over the world hope and pray that Elijah will return to the Passover table, because for many of them that is the first sign of the coming of the Messiah. So, when they saw all of the healing, the miracles and they heard the teachings of Jesus, many began to wonder if Jesus was in fact Elijah returned.

Both John the Baptist and Elijah make some sense, however, why would anyone believe that Jesus could be the prophet Jeremiah? First off, Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet, he wrote the book of Lamentations and there was a rumor that was circulated among faithful Jews that before Israel went into exile, Jeremiah had taken the Ark of the Covenant and the altar from the temple before its destruction and hidden them in a cave somewhere on Mount Nebo. Many of them believed that before the coming of the Messiah Jeremiah would return to the people of Israel and bring the Ark of the Covenant and the altar back to their place within the temple of God. For this reason, many of the faithful held onto the hope that Jesus was Jeremiah returned to fulfill this rumor.

The disciples shared all of the wrong beliefs that were held by the people on who Jesus was. Notice that these were false beliefs of who Jesus was that were held by Jews, by people who claimed to be followers of God who for their own personal reasons and beliefs could not recognize Jesus for who he actually was, the Messiah.

These false beliefs in who Jesus was, these incorrect assumptions on the identity of Christ are still shared today not just by the Jews but also by many false forms of Christianity that exist in the world. These answers would be added to today by the wide variety of people who have created their own idea of who God is, who Jesus is based upon their own ideals and image of who they want God to be.

That is the point that Jesus makes with his second question. The one to which there is only one correct answer, and if answered correctly it results in eternal life and if answered incorrectly results in eternal damnation.

Matthew 16:15-17

¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you,

Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

‘Who do you say I am?’ this is the all-important pass or fail question. This question is not just important for Christians, this is the question that everyone who has ever lived, everyone who is living now and everyone who is destined to live will have to answer when they stand in judgement before the white throne.

Simon Peter answers properly, he gives the one truth that only Christians know and believe fully. Peter answers ‘you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.’ When we refer to Jesus as Jesus Christ many out there think Christ is his family name, he was not Mr. Christ. The truth is that people rarely had a family name in the same way we all do now. Instead, people were referred to in reference to their father.

Jesus does this, he calls Peter, Simon Bar-Jonah, Simon son of Jonah. Jesus would have been referred to as Yeshua be Yosef, Jesus son of Joseph. Christ was the title given to him by the faithful.

Christ in Greek is Kristos, a word which is translated from the Hebrew word Meshiah or simple Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah. In Hebrew Messiah mean to smear something, and it was used to refer to the savior because when someone was called into a position of power or authority among the Israelites they were anointed. They were smeared with an anointing oil across their foreheads. That anointing of oil symbolized that they were chosen by God and God was with them as they fulfilled their call. So, when the disciples are calling Jesus the Messiah, they are saying he is God.

Peter does even further though, Jesus often referred to himself as the Son of man, emphasizing his relationship to humankind. Yet here, Peter says that Jesus is the Son of the Living God, Peter is emphasizing the divinity of Jesus. Peter in this simple statement is saying that Jesus is in every sense the same as the Father. Jesus is fully man and fully God.

Peter has given the only correct answer. Jesus is the Messiah; Jesus is the Son of the Living God. Jesus also says one other thing of great importance. The knowledge of who Jesus is, his true identity is only known because it has been revealed to him by the Father in Heaven. Jesus is making it clear that it is only with the Holy Spirit that people can truly understand who Jesus is, it is beyond the understanding of the common man. If you have ever wondered why so many people in this world believe in the false identities and images of Christ, why so many people believe in a God that does not align with the God of the Bible, here is your answer, they do not have the Holy Spirit to show them clearly who God is in the Scripture.

Now with a better understanding of the context let’s look at this foundational verse.

Matthew 16:18

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The Roman Catholic Church interprets this one way and only one way. Peter is the rock upon which the whole foundation of the organization of the church is to be built. This is why they believe that the pope is the cornerstone of the modern church. The Roman Catholic church prides itself on being able to trace the history and leadership of the church through its discipleship from the current pope all the way back to the apostle Peter.

However, It would appear that the earliest Christians interpreted this verse a little differently. In the book of Acts it is not Peter that is leading the faithful followers of Jesus Christ, instead it is James. Peter is in fact rebuked by Paul in the book of Galatians for his incorrect behavior with the gentiles. So, we need to ask ourselves does the Roman Catholic church have the correct interpretation? Is Peter in fact meant to be the rock upon which the Church is built, or could there be something else that we are meant to understand within this Scripture?

Once again, I will bring us to the Greek. Jesus tells Simon you are Peter or in Greek petros, a small rock or pebble that you would find commonly on the roads of the time, similar to a rock we would find upon a gravel road today.

Then he says upon this petra, a huge standing stone, something large and immovable, upon the petra I will build my church.

What Christ is saying to Simon is that you and your understanding of God is this little stone on the road. However, upon the revelation that God has given to you, upon the understanding that the Holy Spirit has given you, upon that petra, that huge immovable, unchangeable truth, the fact that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of the Living God, upon that one truth and one answer I will build my church.

The confession held by the faithful that Jesus Christ is Messiah and that he is the Lord of Lord and King of Kings is the rock upon which the Church of God is built. The true Church is built upon this rock and not upon any denomination or worldly structure.

God's people believe that Jesus is the Kristus, they know this because the Holy Spirit has revealed the truth to them on who Jesus is and who they are. This is why Christians recognize their own sinful nature and desire to repent, to turn away from their sin and be faithful followers of God. The church is built upon faith and trust in Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is the rock, Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the church, not the man Simon Peter.

1 Corinthians 3:11 says it this way.

1 Corinthians 3:11

¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ

Paul states it clearly for any who read the Scriptures, Jesus is the rock, the foundation of the faith upon which the whole church is built. Jesus, not a pastor, not a translation of the bible, not a denomination, Jesus is the foundation and everyone who confesses in heart, mind, body, and soul that he is their Lord and Savior is building upon that foundation.

This is why even the gates of Hades, the gates of hell, the demons, the devils, Satan or his minions, the false believers of the non-believers can ever overcome the true church. Denominations have the foundation laid upon men, who can be corrupted and overcome by the world due to our sinful nature, but the true church of the faithful can never be overcome because it has its foundation laid upon the unchanging power of Jesus Christ.

Peter does have a job though and we find out what it is in the final verses.

Matthew 16:19-20

¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

The keys of the kingdom are important. Keys allow someone to get into and out of somewhere. Keys allow people to control who enters and who leaves, those who hold the keys become the stewards, the people who are responsible for the care of the place.

In the book of Revelation Jesus has the keys of David

Revelation 3:7

⁷ "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

This is a direct reference to the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 22:20-22

²⁰ In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, ²¹ and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand. And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. ²² And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

Eliakim is the one who is responsible for the opening and closing of the doors to the House of David. He was the house steward; he opened the doors to allow people to enter in the morning and closed the doors at night so that no one else could enter.

This is what Jesus is calling Peter to do. Simon Peter is called to be a steward of the church.

It is Peter who on the day of Pentecost delivers a sermon to the crowd. It was through his message that 3000 People converted to Christianity that day.

It was Peter who was called to go to Cornelius and to all of his household, breaking what would have been law to the Jews of the time by bringing the message of Jesus to the gentiles.

Peter was the one that God used to open the door of the church. Peter was the one that become a steward of the church opening the way to God for both the Jew and the Gentile.

So, Peter answers the second question truthfully and correctly. The Holy Spirit was upon him, and he was used by God for the Glory of God's kingdom.

Yet in the last lines of today's Scripture the disciples are still told that they should not share this message with anyone. Why did Jesus do this?

Jesus did this because our discovery of who Jesus Christ is must be our own.

No one can make the declaration of who Jesus is for you.

This question we all must answer on the day of Judgement 'Who do you say I am?' is a question that you must answer for yourself.

Throughout mankind's history people have called Jesus many things.

Some have called him a great thinker, a great theologian, a good man with great moral teachings. Some will only know their own truths about who Jesus is, others will have a Jesus that they have changed and edited to match their own life and choices.

Yet this is not the answer that Jesus is seeking when he asks you "Who do you say I am?" The question to which there is only one correct answer that determines eternity. Jesus Christ is Lord of Lord and Kings of Kings, the one to whom we should repent and obey as we begin to understand the sacrifice, He made for us and the grace he has had upon us in our lives.

Ask yourselves, what is Jesus Christ to you? How does your life reflect your faith in God? How will you answer the most important question you will ever have on your day of Judgement?

Let us pray,

For Grace By Augustine of Hippo

We ask not of you, O Father,
silver and gold,
honor and glory,

nor the pleasures of the world.
 Grant us grace to seek your Kingdom
 and your righteousness,
 and give us what we need for body and life.
 Behold, O Lord, our desire.
 May it be pleasing in your sight.
 We present our petition to you through our Lord Jesus Christ,
 who is at your right hand,
 our mediator and Advocate,
 through whom you sought us that we might seek you;
 your Word, through whom you made us and all things;
 your only Son, through whom you call us to adoption,
 who intercedes with you for us,
 and in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;
 to him, with you and the Holy Spirit,
 be all honor, praise, and glory, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn #315: “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” (V 1,2,4)

A mighty fortress is our God,
 a refuge never failing;
 our helper sure amid the flood
 of mortal ills prevailing.
 For still our ancient foe
 yet seek to work us woe;
 with craft and power are great,
 and armed with cruel hate,
 on earth has not an equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,
 our striving would be losing,
 were not a Saviour on our side,
 the One of God's own choosing.
 Who is this Saviour, who?
 Christ Jesus, living, true.
 Lord Sabaoth by name,
 from age to age the same;
 already wins the battle.

That Word above all earthly powers
 no thanks to them abiding,
 ensures that all God's gifts are ours,
 through Christ in us residing.
 Whose summons rings above all goods,
 all earthly love.

Earth's powers waste away;
 God's word endures always,
 whose reign will last is forever!

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspertthoffering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer

(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn #487: "Onward, Christian Soldiers" (V 1,2)

Onward, Christian soldiers,
 marching as to war,
 with the cross of Jesus
 going on before!
 Christ the royal Master,
 leads against the foe;
 forward in to battle,
 see his banners go.

Refrain:

Onward, Christian soldiers,
 marching as to war,
 with the cross of Jesus
 going on before!

Crowns and thrones may perish,
 kingdoms rise and wane,
 but the Church of Jesus
 constant will remain;

gates of hell can never
 'gainst that church prevail;
 we have Christ's own promise,
 and that cannot fail.
 (Refrain)

Pastoral Prayer

Lord God, Loving God, gather us into your presence as we pray.
 Silence our hearts and minds in these moments
 so that we may listen for the movement of your Holy Spirit
 who prays within us through our sighs too deep for words.

O God, we lay before you our thanks and our concerns
 as we remember those who have come to our attention through conversations
 or chance encounters this week.
 We offer gratitude for moments of joy and goodness,
 and remembered pleasures stirred by your Spirit;

We remember all those whose situations are very close to our hearts today,
 those facing stress or sorrow,
 those challenged by pain or illness,
 those making a new beginning or searching for a new path.

We remember the things in the news lately that concern us deeply:
 the stress on the environment and worries about its future,
 the pressures on those who have lost jobs or cannot find work,
 the pain of those who meet discrimination or hatred in daily life,
 tensions among nations who threaten each other
 And we remember one another and needs known and unknown in this community.

Bless us as we make a new beginning together as summer turns to autumn.
 Show us the paths of ministry you are opening before us.
 We believe you hear our prayers and will be faithful to answer according to your will.
 We pray these words in the name of Jesus Christ, our lord and savior,
 Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit
 As the one true God now and forever. **Amen.**

Benediction

May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love for you,
 and keep you in his peace.
 May you receive strength
 to grow in faith, hope, and love,
 to live with joy and delight,
 and to give God thanks and praise. **Amen.**