

**NELCSA Winter series services**  
**5 July 2020**  
**Who is this Jesus who is building his Church?**

Matthew 16, 13-18

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He questioned His disciples: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” 14They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

15“But what about you?” Jesus asked. “Who do you say I am?”

16Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

17Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven. 18And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

Dear sisters and brothers,

Fake news - with the spread of the COVID-19 virus, we were warned against fake news doing the rounds. Some made the situation out to be harmless, others to be much worse than it really was. Other fake news spoke about remedies, such as drinking disinfectant or bleach. Much of this fake news referred to “experts” (My daughter’s friend’s room mate’s dad is an expert, who says that...)

But even recognized experts were found working with false assumptions and non-verified research results.

Jesus says: “I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it”. This is quite a strong statement! Is it too good to be true?

In view of the crisis that we are going through - no contact church services, bible studies, home groups, counselling by phone only, one can seriously ask: Will the church, our congregation, survive this? Will Jesus really carry us through this? Or is his promise fake news, a claim that cannot be substantiated?

There are two important questions to ask in order to establish the reliability of statements:

Firstly: What evidence do we have that this promise can be trusted?

Fortunately we do have evidence - two thousand years of data gathered since Jesus first said these words.

For two thousand years he has built his church, and large time spans were extremely difficult and challenging. So, based purely on this historical data, it seems that Jesus has indeed honoured his promise - at least till today! But will he continue to honour it?

The second question to be asked is: Who is making this statement? Who is this Jesus who promises to build his church?

In preparation for this message I decided to read through the gospel of Matthew in one session. I did not quite succeed, but managed, with brief interruptions, to do it over one and a half days. I did it with the questions: Who is this Jesus? How reliable is he? Can he be trusted? It was an interesting read, discovering him again in these exceptional times. I encourage you to do the same, and see what you discover.

I want so sum up my discoveries in seven points. But I will keep them short!

### **1. Jesus is part of a long journey of God with God's world.**

Matthew (Mt 1) starts the genealogy of Jesus not with Adam, but with Abraham. In Genesis 12,3 we read of God calling Abraham and giving him a promise: "All peoples/nations on earth will be blessed through you". Over centuries the self understanding of Israel was corrupted into a "we are chosen and all others are rejected". God's intention, however, from the beginning has been that all nations should be blessed!

The Gospel of Matthew starts with the reference to Abraham, and then ends with the words (Mt 28, 19) "Make disciples of all nations". The Good News is not reserved for a few chosen ones, but intended for all people on earth!

Jesus is not a "fly by night" or part of a short lived experiment of God, but part of a journey that God had all along - that all people should be blessed. So, when we ask: Will church survive, we must keep this journey of God in mind, and ask: Has the goal been achieved? The answer is clear: No. The journey continues. That alone is sufficient reason for the church to continue!

### **2. Jesus does not take shortcuts to succeed.**

Twice we read that Jesus was tempted to take shortcuts. At the onset of his ministry, in Matthew 4, we read that the devil tempted Jesus. He challenged him to perform a major stunt with angels from heaven carrying him, or to turn

stones into bread - both would have immediately made Jesus famous. Finally he promised Jesus all kingdoms on earth, there and then. He promised instant success. Jesus declined.

At the end of his ministry, in Matthew 26, 36ff we read of Jesus' prayer-battle in Gethsemane: "If it is possible, take this cup, this suffering to come, from me" he prays. The temptation to take a shortcut must have been incredibly intense, for, when the soldiers arrive to capture him, Jesus says (26,53): "I could have called ten thousand angels!" . I was struck by the similarity to the words uttered by the devil in Matthew 4: Make use of the angels to set you free! Jesus could have - but he did not! But the temptation must have been so strong, to take this shortcut!

Jesus knew that he had to walk the difficult road, and he did- to the end. And then, in Matthew 28,18 we read: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me" Had he taken the shortcut in Mt 4, his authority would be only on earth. Had he taken it in Mt 26, he would not have any authority on earth. He did not take a shortcut, but walked the full journey to reach a full victory, as Lord of all Lords, in heaven and on earth!

### **3. Jesus knows how tough the road ahead can be.**

He experienced it first hand. Time and again he warned his disciples of what would happen in Jerusalem, that he would suffer and die. In Gethsemane (Mt 26, 36ff) his prayer battle shows how afraid he was, because he knew what was coming. And when he then cried: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27, 46) he had reached the deepest, toughest place any being can reach.

He saw it coming, did not take a shortcut, but travelled the road - to lead us to life! And because he knows how it feels, he can then really also comfort and strengthen us!

### **4. Jesus leads through storms.**

In Mt 14, 22ff we read how Jesus calms the storm. In Mt 24 Jesus then tells us about very different storms that will be coming, storms that will not be calmed, but that he will lead us through.

In our current times it is important to note that Jesus did not promise plain sailing all the time. Yet he did promise that he will lead us through the storms. The two thousand years of church history have got countless examples of such extreme situations, sometimes with immense suffering, through which

Christians were carried. And yes, many did die, but even in dying knew that they were carried. I just mention two examples of such people who perished, and yet knew they were safe: Stephen in Acts 7:54ff, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany.

Even in the toughest storms Jesus carries, and looks after us. This leads to the next observation:

### **5. Jesus leads through serving and calls us to do the same.**

This particular aspect, in Mt 20,20-28, remains one of the biggest challenges to leaders in the church. Somehow the attraction of power and position all too often seems to win. Jesus builds his church - not through powerful people of position, but through people using their position and power to serve! To serve is not a weakness, but rather means to use your strength to build others, so that they too may become strong servers! (The third message in this series will focus on this)

### **6. Jesus invites to trust and follow.**

After calling the disciples, Jesus trains them and then sends them out (Mt. 10). He leads by example and does not expect more than what he himself was doing. He does not give orders, but builds a relationship and then invites us to join him. When he then calls us in Mt 28,18-20, it is not a “mission command”, but when we see it in its context of a relationship of trust and care, it actually is a “great invitation!” Jesus wants to transform us into a new life and make us part of his great movement!

### **7. Jesus calls people - one by one.**

Although Jesus did preach to large gatherings and spoke to large groups, it is interesting to note that he ultimately always dealt with people on a one-on-one basis. He called his disciples - not by asking for twelve volunteers from the crowd, but by picking them - each one personally (Mt 5, 18ff). When people brought their needy friends, Jesus healed - not in a sweeping mass healing, but one by one. He touches, talks to the individuals, asks them questions (what do you want me to do?). Most importantly, because he deals with us one on one, he sees the deeper need. When he says to the paralysed (Mt 9, 18) “Your sins are forgiven” many are confused. They think being paralysed is the biggest need. Jesus knows the deeper need of that particular person!

This is a wonderful aspect of the nature of Jesus: He does not deal with

humanity in one generic approach - one size fits all - but in this journey to win the world does it person to person! You and I might be part of a large crowd following Jesus (such as Mt 4, 25) - but when it comes to the crunch, Jesus focuses on me, on you, one on one! When you read this, you might be one of many readers. But to Jesus you are unique and he cares about you right now, there, where you are! He sees your deepest needs!

**Who is this Jesus?** I asked. These are some of the credentials of the one who said: I will build my church.

Yes, we are going through tough times. Yes, much will change. Some things will never be the same again.

But somehow I know: Jesus Christ will stick to his promise. He will not give up on the journey, because the task is not finished yet. He knew that tough times would come, and will carry us through.

And he invites me and you - not in a mass appeal and state of the nation address, but in person - to join him, to be part of his church, to be part of his movement to the nations of the world.

Today we asked the question: Who is this Jesus? Can he be trusted? I believe we can! And I hope that you will agree!

Amen

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The sermon is also available as video at: <https://youtu.be/voSMjSqYUkc>

Next week we will focus on the message of Jesus, asking: What is so special about it?