

Sermon - Steve Stanis

8am/10am 13 March 2022, 8:30am/6pm 20 March 2022



Where are you God? Flooded by fear or faith?! Why this catastrophe? Climate change versus a one in a 10, 100, or a 1000-year weather pattern! Blaming government where floods have now overwhelmed!

The past week many have been heard suggesting it may have been time to build an Ark. Can we sing with faith, "God reigns" versus the fear of God rains!

Building faith, not fear!

Today we read of a very significant conversation between Jesus and his disciples. He has been living with them for three years. They have witnessed his compassionate attitude

to people. They have heard his wisdom in his teaching. They have seen his miracles.

This conversation is a defining moment. Jesus asks the disciples two crucial questions (verse 13):

'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'

They reply: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, another prophet.

Then he personalises it in (verse 15) - *'Who do you say I am?'*

Peter answers...

'You are the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

What a profound declaration! The Jews had been waiting for centuries for the Messiah. Now Peter is naming Jesus as that expected and predicted One. **THIS IS BIG!**

Jesus responds firstly to acknowledge that God had revealed this to him and that his understanding and faith are the basis on which his church, Jesus' church, would be built.

(Verse 18) says, *"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."*

Here Jesus says, **I will build my Church.**

I will build my Church!

Jesus is the builder. The church is created and formed by Jesus Christ... the very Son of God whom Peter has just confessed. There is no other builder. It is the Church of the

risen, exalted Christ. He planned it, he purchased it and he is the head over it.

"I am their God and they are my people"

Building faith, not fear... and another link to flooding!

The Dutch understood building resistance to flooding, keeping out the sea by inventing dykes. Abraham Kuyper, lived in the Netherlands in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He was a pastor, a journalist, a newspaper founder, a professor, a university founder, a parliament member and a prime minister.

From these many vantage points, Kuyper sought to work out the implications of the gospel. He asked the question "What is the chief end of humanity?"

His listeners knew the answer ... to glorify God

He then asked, "What is God's chief end?" No-one answered.

The answer Kuyper gave is, 'It is God's chief end in creation and redemption that he might have a people of whom he could say, "I am their God and they are my people. I 'covenant' that I will be their God and they shall be my people through all eternity."

Through all eternity... We are looking at a universal church throughout all time.

The Nicene Creed contains a line that says, "We believe in one holy universal and apostolic church." Previously we said 'the holy Catholic Church'. This might be more familiar to you, but it was changed for those who found it confusing. The Creed is

referring to the universal Church rather than the Roman Catholic Church.

Church leaders in the fourth century wrote the Nicene Creed after gathering from far and wide. In the Creed, they wrote down the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith. Each leader represented a local community of believers. Together, they represented the universal church.

The Council of Nicaea was the first time they had gathered together, visibly representing Christians from all over Christendom - the known world at that time!

Returning to our text... It is Jesus' disciples who must understand his purpose because Jesus is going to use them to build his Universal Church. Jesus was preparing his disciples to send them out at this very time.

Jesus was taking his disciples from the region of Caesarea Philippi (verse 13) and turning his face to Jerusalem. This is the point where he begins to teach them about the things to come - his suffering, death and resurrection.

God's universal Church does not come packaged in a building. There are many united to Christ as their Saviour who are gathered in other places than our church building... like at Blue Haven, in schools and in homes. There are those who gather online, as part of our live stream. So many other future possibilities...

The very essence of last Wednesday night's new Parish Council was to discuss the coming years, possibilities, and God's plans for his people at KAC.

Our Mission and our Vision is to fulfil this, growing KAC through faithful and not fearful prayer, binding and integrating all generations, connecting all places and possibilities together, deepening faith not fearing ridicule or rejection.

In being transformed we are intentional and authentic in our love and service of others as Jesus directs us as his people. Jesus urges his disciples then, as he does now,

"Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (verse 24).

Was this not the very nature of this next step in Jesus' walk in this passage we study today?!

The concept of the universal church is important for Christians to grasp as we trust Christ and look to the future. Movements will rise and fall, *like floods and droughts*, and individual churches will come and go, but God's people, the church universal, will never be destroyed.

Why? Because Jesus builds his church and Jesus will not fail. Jesus' promise to build his church should give us hope and certainty that God's purposes for his church will ultimately succeed. But like Peter, we struggle with our faith.

Building faith, not fear!

FAITH is the key to entry into the spiritual domain; heaven itself, the kingdom where God rules.

In Hebrews 11:1 we are told *"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see"*.

Peter has made the ultimate declaration of faith and then, moments later, (in verse 22) he reprimands Jesus for talking about suffering and (probably) fear kicks in. Has this happened to you?

In (verse 23) Jesus actually rebukes him - *"Get away from me Satan!"* What a blow! From the heights of delight after his crucial declaration to being compared to Satan.

However, this is a significant moment of growth in Peter's faith. There are and always will be the ups and downs of each one's faith journey... moments of doubts and questions yet to be answered. When you understand them, then you will see that God is growing your trust more deeply in Jesus.

If faith is so crucial, what is it like? Once you have it, does it ever waver, do you ever get wobbly and have doubts?

Let's look at a glimpse of Peter's faith journey.

Back to Galilee...

Remember the time when the disciples were out on the lake and Jesus appeared to them like a ghost. Peter, on recognising him, jumps out of the boat and walks on water toward Jesus. While he looks to Jesus he succeeds but when fear arises and he looks down at the wild sea, his faith wavers and he begins to sink.

There's a great book called, 'If you want to walk on water, you have to jump out of the boat'. It asks, where were the others? At least Peter got out and had that experience and no doubt learnt from it.

Forward to Jerusalem...

At the time of Jesus' arrest and trial by the Jewish leaders, Peter was in the courtyard where he was recognised but, because of his fear, he denied Jesus on three occasions. Was it unforgivable? It certainly was painful.

But after his resurrection, Jesus came to the disciples back at Galilee and spent time alone with Peter. At that breakfast on the beach, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him.

Of course, he is forgiven because then Jesus commands him 'to feed my sheep'. So once again, Peter learnt from his mistake and felt Jesus' forgiveness and his faith grew.

Doubts and fears are doorways to the next stage of the faith journey if properly dealt with. Yet each individual Christian life has a profound larger impact on others.

God used Peter to 'build my Church', Jesus said. With the rock as the cornerstone of God's people to be the foundation.

Dual participation in faith...

In (verse 17) Jesus comments that Peter didn't work this out himself but that 'it was his father in heaven who had revealed it to him'... it's a different level than the human understanding.

Fortunately, God knows what individuals need, for example Paul needed a Damascus experience (Acts 9) and Lydia just

needed a gentle nudge (Acts 16) but in his time and his way, God speaks to people through the Holy Spirit.

As God's people we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit. BUT... we have to do our part as well; we have to choose to live God's way.

(Verse 24) If we want to be a follower of Jesus we are told 'to turn from selfish ways, take up our cross and follow him' and, in verse 25, to seek after eternal things. We are called to have a change in our priorities by not holding on to this life but to focus on our soul's health.

Remember...!

- Your faith is more precious than gold so don't underestimate its value in and for your life. What value is your faith to your life today?
- Your faith is a work in progress so don't get discouraged by doubts and mistakes as they are learning opportunities. Be brave enough to be open to learn on your journey.
- Your faith community is needed to process the difficulties, challenges and questions that will come your way. Share the journey with others whom you trust. Ideally all of us at KAC.
- Your faith has a dual purpose. Being prompted by the Spirit and responded to by yourself. Listen and find ways to learn what God is teaching you.
- God delights in your growth. How has your faith been growing at this time in your life? What has God said to you through this message?