

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 51:1-6

The LORD's Comfort for Zion

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. 2 Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. 3 For the LORD comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. 4 “Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. 5 My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait. 6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

We may think that God has spoken enough words of comfort through His prophet (40:1; 49:13). However, God knows how “slow of heart to believe” (Lk 24:25) those are “who seek the LORD” (Is 51:1), even those whom He calls “My people” (v 4) and who “know righteousness” (v 7). Therefore, in this chapter He again pleads for faith in His power to redeem. Four times He calls them to listen to Him (vv 1, 4, 7, 21). He makes the invitation attractive by variations on the theme. (TLSB)

51:1 *listen* – That is, to the God of their fathers, who now addresses them

The children of Israel had not listened to God for a long time. They had followed the gods of the people around them. Often they were the gods that were in the hills. (Ashtoreth poles) *Ashtoreths*. Female deities such as Ashtoreth (consort of Baal) and Asherah (consort of El, the chief god of the Canaanite pantheon). Ashtoreth was associated with the evening star and was the beautiful goddess of war and fertility. She was worshiped as Ishtar in Babylonia and as Athtart in Aram. To the Greeks she was Astarte or Aphrodite, and to the Romans, Venus. Worship of the Ashtoreths involved extremely lascivious practices (1Ki 14:24; 2Ki 23:7). (Commentary from Judges 2:13 – CSB)

Psalm 121:1 alludes to that when it says, “I lift up my eyes to the hills— where does my help come from?”

The commentary on that verse says, “*hills*. Those in the vicinity of Jerusalem, of which Mount Zion is one (125:2), or, if the plural indicates majesty (as in the Hebrew in 87:1; 133:3), Mount Zion itself. – His help and security do not come from the hills, but from the Lord who made the hills and everything else in the universe.”

There are many voices out there that are shrieking this message to us. Even many TV commercials have people literally yelling. But God comes in a “gentle whisper.”

1 Kings 19:11-12, “¹¹ The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake,

but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.”

When we feel forsaken, when it appears that “the gates of hell” are winning worldwide, to what does our Lord direct our thoughts? He asks us to call to mind and learn, be strengthened and encouraged by the mighty deed He has done for and on behalf of His children in the past. Somehow that seems to be the last thing we turn to when troubles and difficulties come in our personal life and in the church in general. (Counselors tell us that when people encounter problems they leave their best supports of faith, family, and friends.) How easily we forget the myriad of times the Lord brought us and His church unscathed through much worse than our present problem or trouble. (LL)

who pursue righteousness. Cf. v. 7; Dt 16:20; Pr 15:9. (CSB)

In contrast to those who trust in themselves and their do-it-yourself spirituality (50:11). (TLSB)

The word may mean imputed righteousness in the sense of being put right with God. But one need not stop short with that concept. For such imputed righteousness, if sincere, always brings with it the desire to produce ethical conduct worthy of a justified man. So we take the entire phrase “pursue righteousness” as a description of sincere godliness, and a mark of a faithful member of God’s chosen people. (Leupold)

rock. Abraham (v. 2). Elsewhere God is called “the Rock.” (CSB)

Israel did not create itself. It came into being like stones hewn and dug from a rock vein in a quarry. (TLSB)

Abraham is the first person overtly credited in Scripture with “righteousness” through faith alone (Gen. 15:6). This is one reason Yahweh points people to consider the patriarch. He instructs them to recall their past and return to the roots of their faith, the “rock” and “quarry” from which they came. His promises of grace to Abraham formed the bedrock upon which Israel was first built, and Sarah was the cavity from which Israel was born. (CC)

We are not left to vague guesses as to what the call has in mind, for verse 2 gives the official interpretation. (Leupold)

By faith we are also descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). We are cut from the same rock, the same quarry. When our world seems barren and without hope, remember how God fulfilled His promises. He will not fail to fulfill all of them, even if it may appear impossible. (PBC)

5:2 *was but one.* See Ge 12:1; Eze 33:24. (CSB)

Abraham, “as good as dead,” became many when “by faith Sarah ... received power to conceive” (Rm 4:19; Heb 11:11–12; cf Ac 7:5). (TLSB)

The prospects of developing into a nation were most unlikely. (Leupold)

Romans 4:16-19, “¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.”^c He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. ¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹

Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead.”

The Lord directs His people to return to the story of Abraham and Sarah. Both of them left their homeland and traveled to a far distant land because God invited them to go and promised great things. (PBC)

called. Chosen by God. (TLSB)

bless him and multiply him. The barrenness of Israel’s three matriarchs, Sarah (Gn 11:30), Rebekah (Gn 25:21), and Rachel (Gn 29:31), highlight the fact that the Lord chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1Co 1:27–28). (TLSB)

51:3 Zion. Envisioned as both place and person (60:14; ch 62). (TLSB)

comforts. Other promises of paradise restored are in 4:2; 32:15; 35:1–2; 61:3–4; 65:21–22 (cf Rv 21–22). (TLSB)

The whole process is comprehended in the one term “comfort,” which includes feeling sorry for the one in need and also administering help. Echoes of 40:1 ring out rather clearly at this point. (Leupold)

wilderness like Eden. See 35:1–2. The contrast between the lush splendor of Eden and the barrenness of the desert is found also in Joel 2:3. Cf. Ge 2:8, 10. (CSB)

More than merely returning to Jerusalem of the past, the restoration will be like the perfection of Eden. Israel will be once again a well-tended garden (cf Is 5:1–2). (TLSB)

In 32:15-18, Isaiah describes Yahweh’s gift of the Spirit transforming the land. The wilderness, useful only for pasturing sheep, will be changed into a place where fruit trees will grow (cf. 29:17; 41:19). The outpouring of the Spirit accompanies the bestowal of flowing streams of water in 44:3 and has baptismal overtones (cf. Ezek. 36:24-27). In this verse the prophet furthers this idea that the waste, desert, and desolate places will be replaced with joy, gladness, thanksgiving, and the sound of music. Israel’s election is related intrinsically to the possession in the land (e.g., Deut. 4:37-38) so that if Israel is not dwelling permanently in the land, then its election has apparently been rendered meaningless. On the other hand, to be elected once again means to be brought in and settled in the land...once again. Yahweh will reverse the curse (cf. Neh. 13:2). (CC)

A colorful figure is resorted to. Israel in Captivity is thought of as a waste land, whose desolation is to be brought to an end, so that what was like a waste now will be like the famous paradise of days of old before man’s calamitous fall into sin. (Leupold)

Joy and gladness. Joy and gladness will again be found because of the transformation that is to take place. And the response on Israel’s part will be “thanksgiving and sounds of praise.” This last part could be reminiscent of Jeremiah 30:19. (Leupold)

Jeremiah 30:19, “From them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing. I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased; I will bring them honor, and they will not be disdained.”

51:4-6 – It may be remarked that this section contains a number of expressions that are clearly echoes of the Servant passages. (Leupold)

Cf 42:1–4; 49:6. The Lord will send His Servant to bestow these gifts. The Lord comes to His waiting people, not the other way around. Note the terms set parallel here: “law,” “justice,” “light,” “righteousness,” “salvation,” and “My arms.” (TLSB)

51:4 *give attention* – The Lord is about to make a solemn pronouncement to which He wants His people to give strict attention. (Leupold)

kawshab – To perk up one’s ears and pay close attention to what is about to be said. To hold the coming message in high regard.

Give ear to me, my nation – God is deeply concerned for the future of His own. Israel is the basis of all development but what is developed there is for the people generally. (Leupold)

awzan – To expand or broaden out one’s ear so as to take in everything that is said. All growth and development is to begin with instruction from the Lord.

law ... my justice.† The rule of the servant would bring justice. (CSB)

In the OT era, the coastlands largely waited in vain for Yahweh’s teaching to go forth from Israel (cf. 42:4). The nation’s idolatry stifled its witness to the world (42:19; 18:1). Therefore, the teaching will go forth directly from Yahweh (cf. Is. 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3) through his loyal Servant. They share in the same mission (cf. Jn. 10:30). But as the Servant seeks to establish Yahweh’s will, he encounters serious setbacks (Is. 50:4-11), and his mission ends in a death with the wicked (52:13-53:12). However, his interment (53:9) on Good Friday does not mean the end; he arises victorious on Easter (52:13; 53:12). The risen Servant sends forth his “servants” in mission. (CC)

Heaven and earth will pass away but the Lord’s kingdom will endure forever. All growth and development is to begin with “instruction” that Israel gets as to the big issues involved. (Leupold)

torah – This is the Pentateuch which includes both Law and Gospel.

mishpat – A verdict or sentence. In this case the word comprises both “justification” (God’s “justice – undeserved grace or salvation) and “sanctification,” a norm of behavior corresponding to God’s norm. God’s justice is salvation by grace through faith in the Christ’s death and resurrection.

light to the peoples. The servant is the light in 42:6; 49:6. (CSB)

God’s Word and restoration are not restricted to Israel but will touch a wide range of nations. (TLSB)

The light kindled in Israel will throw its kindly beams for people the world over. (Leupold)

ore – Illumination like daylight or sun shine. Jesus is that light that is to be shared with all people. The light kindled for Israel’s use will also throw light beams to people all over the world.

Isaiah 42:6 “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.”

Isaiah 49:6 “he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

51:5 *righteousness draws near*. In the deliverance from exile. Ultimately, salvation through Christ will come to all nations. Righteousness is equivalent to salvation. (CSB)

He will powerfully divide the righteous from the wicked (cf Mt 25:31–46). (TLSB)

If Yahweh is committed to the restoration of his people, what will he do about the sin that precipitated Israel’s apostasy, idolatry, and exile? He will commission Cyrus to conquer Israel’s conqueror Babylon (Is. 47), but how will he save Israel? The Suffering Servant is Yahweh’s answer. He embodies Yahweh’s arm (53:1). “Righteousness” and “Salvation” come through this mighty “arm” (51:5). Through this loyal Servant, God restores Israel and brings enduring salvation also to the Gentiles. (CC)

The word righteousness is translated “victory,” a possibility that cannot be reproduced in English. All this is spoken of in the perfect tense, for it all refers to things that have as good happened. (Leupold)

tsehdek – Legal equity and prosperity. This is forensic righteousness as declared by God and not earned by us. Ultimately it is the salvation which we have through Jesus.

Isaiah 46:13 “I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel.”

arms. Symbolizes power. (CSB)

God’s successful overall rule could hardly be described more simply and clearly than in the words “my arm.” All issues of history lie in the hollow of God’s hand. (Leupold)

zeroaw - It illustrates mighty power, strength and help for those who need it.

Exodus 6:6 “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.’”

Numbers 11:21-23, ²¹ But Moses said, “Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, ‘I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!’ ²² Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?” ²³ The LORD answered Moses, “Is the LORD’s arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you.”

coastlands. The coastlands and islands of the Mediterranean are probably intended. (CSB)

hope. Trust in or look expectantly. (CSB)

Ultimately these benefits will accrue to all nations. The nations themselves in the secrets of their heart wait for the time when they will have a share in these blessings. (Leupold)

51:6 *Lift ... to the heavens.* See 40:26. (CSB)

This is the third time in the chapter that Yahweh commands the captives to “look confidently” in faith (see also 51:1-2). He is repeating an earlier direction to Abram (Gen. 15:5). (CC)

Amazing, isn't it! According to the *World Book Encyclopedia*, “with large telescopes astronomers can photograph over thirty billion stars. And we think there must be billions more beyond the reach of our most powerful telescopes.” Not only is He able to name each one but also brings out each one every night.

nawsaw – Lift to lofty place.

Isaiah 40:26 “Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.”

vanish like smoke. Disturbances in the heavens characterize the day of the Lord. (CSB)

sky ... scroll ... starry host will fall. † Referred to in Mt 24:29 in connection with the second coming of Christ.). (CSB)

The Lord invites His people to consider things that seem unalterably fixed and sure – the heavens above and the earth beneath. Nothing appears to be more stable than these works of the Lord's hands. But they are not among the things that endure to all eternity. (Leupold)

earth will wear out like a garment. See 24:4; Heb 1:10–11; cf. Isa 50:9. (CSB)

Neither creation nor the enemies of God's people are eternal. The material world is transitory, but the Word of the Lord “will not pass away” (Mt 24:35; cf Mt 5:18). (TLSB)

The dwellers upon the earth will share in the same lot in the great judgment, perishing like swarms of gnats, in a merciless and total judgment, many though they may be at the time the judgment takes place. (Leupold)

my salvation - yeshooaw – To be saved from something or delivered and experience victory. (QV)

Yahweh's comments about the transitory nature of creation contrast with his everlasting salvation and righteousness. These gifts will never fail (Ps. 102:25-27), quoted in Heb. 1:10-12). If creation may appear to be stable and lasting, even more is Yahweh's plan to save Israel. Even if the heavens and earth dissipate, his love will never cease (cf. Jer. 31:35-36; Mk. 13:31). (CC)

will be forever. † See v. 8; 45:17. God will be faithful to all of his promises. The word of God will also endure forever (CSB)

Contrast is similar to that in Is 40:6–8. The salvation and righteousness of the Lord will never fail. (TLSB)

Another way of saying this is, “my victory shall never be annulled.” (Leupold)

God is faithful to all his promises. His word will not pass away, even though everything else will (Matthew 24:35).

Isaiah 45:17 “But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting.”

my righteousness - tse-daw-kaw – This is a rightness that has to do with justice, objectivity and virtue.

Will never be dismayed – The word fail is chathath and means to break down or be abolished. This phrase is saying that God’s righteousness will not ever fail or be lost.

EPISTLE – Romans 11:33-12:8

Mystery of Israel’s Salvation

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” 35 “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

11:33–36† The doxology that ends this section of Romans is the natural outpouring of Paul’s praise to God, whose wisdom and knowledge brought about his great plan for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles who believe. (CSB)

Ascription of praise in doxological form as Paul ponders in awe God’s inscrutable ways (cf Eph 3:21). (TLSB)

11:33 oh – This interjection goes as an exclamation with the entire verse.

The dept of the riches – The wealth of God’s grace and glory (2:4; 9:23; 10:12; cf 2Co 8:9), the wisdom of His purposeful actions in history to save (cf 1Co 1:18–31; Eph 1:8; 3:10; Col 2:2–3), and His intimate knowledge of us (cf 8:29; 11:2; 1Co 8:3) are too deep for human beings to fathom. (TLSB)

All men end up in beggary (11:32); only God is rich, inexhaustibly rich, rich in kindness and forbearance (2:4), rich in glory (9:23), and the Lord whom He gave to Jew and Greek is rich in His beneficence toward all who call on Him (10:12). God cannot fail for lack of means in compassing His ends. God is wise. He uses all His riches in a sure, astounding governance of history that overawes and humbles men. (Franzmann)

unsearchable are his judgments – God’s decisions (the ways He thinks). (TLSB)

The apostle Paul sings a great doxology of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How beyond our ability to grasp are His ways. God has bestowed on His created humans the precious gift of a rational mind. We pride ourselves in our ability to analyze and explain many of the phenomena God has put into our world. We measure accurately time and space and dimensions. We devise mathematical formulas to explain the relationship of these to each other. We apply logic to arrive at profound truths concerning our universe. We have even succeeded in manipulating the genetic code! (Portals of Prayer – 2/16)

But we are less than infants when it comes to plumbing the “depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” What earthly standard can measure His great love in giving His only Son to die in the place of His rebellious creatures? What mathematical formula can explain the new birth in which He re-created us in Holy Baptism? By what logic does our Lord physically come to us with forgiveness in His Holy Supper? Can the genetic code reveal “what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9)? With the apostle we can only sing, “To Him be the glory forever!” (Portals of Prayer – 2/16)

The doxological hymn in vv 33–36 concludes Romans 9–11 and introduces the remaining section of Romans, which especially addresses the Christian life. These four verses are the traditional Epistle for Holy Trinity Sunday, rejoicing in the deep and unfathomable mystery of the Godhead. The hymn is introduced by the concluding words of 11:32, “that he may have mercy on all.” The “depths” (*bathos*) praised here are searched and revealed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:10; Eph 3:18). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

11:34-35 These three rhetorical questions praise the greatness of God’s mercy toward man. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

11:34 Rhetorical questions highlighting the absurdity of anyone teaching God anything. We have no access to God’s thinking except what He chooses to reveal to us. (TLSB)

who has known the mind of the Lord – “Who has given Him advice?” Isaiah asked (Is 40:13). (Franzmann)

11:35 *that he might be repaid* – Rules out any thought that the Creator God owes us anything. (TLSB)

No man has ever made God his debtor with a gift. “Who has given me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine,” the Lord told trembling Job (Job 41:13). (Franzmann)

11:36 *from Him and through Him and to Him*. With three prepositions, Paul declares God, Creator and Savior, to be the source, means, and goal of everything. He is Alpha and Omega. (TLSB)

The triune God is the source, mediator, and purpose of all things, for which he receives eternal praise. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

11:25–36 In ways beyond our understanding, God has acted in mercy to bring salvation to Jews and Gentiles. Human beings cannot exchange roles with God, presuming to sit in judgment of Him. But we in whom His Spirit dwells praise Him for His inexhaustible kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. • To You alone, O triune Lord, belongs all glory forever. Amen. (TLSB)

A Living Sacrifice

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.

Ch 12 Luth: “In chapter 12 [Paul] teaches what true worship is, and makes all Christians priests. They are to offer not money or cattle, as under the law, but their own bodies, with slaying of the lusts. Then he describes the outward conduct of Christians, under the spiritual government, telling how they are to teach,

preach, rule, serve, give, suffer, love, live, and act toward friend, foe, and all men. These are the works that a Christian does; for, as has been said, faith takes no holidays” (AE 35:378). (TLSB)

12:1–16:27† Paul now turns to the practical application of all he has said previously in the letter. Paul goes into detail to show that Jesus Christ is to be Lord of every area of life. These chapters are not a postscript to the great theological discussions in chs. 1–11. In a certain sense the entire letter has been directed toward the goal of showing that God demands our Christian life as well as our believing and thinking. Faith expresses itself in obedience. (CSB)

12:1 *I appeal to you.* Paul draws an important inference from the truth set forth in chs. 1–11. (CSB)

mercies of God.† Much of the letter has been concerned with demonstrating this truth. (CSB)

Key to understanding the rest of Rm. God’s mercies have been fully expressed in Christ and powerfully articulated in chs 1–11 (note esp 11:30–32). The exhortations to follow are the proper response to those mercies; however, obedience does not earn or add to God’s favor. (TLSB)

The new worship is grounded in “the mercies of God.” In that phrase Paul sums up the creative and transforming power of the Gospel of God as he has been proclaiming it in the first 11 chapters. (Franzmann)

your bodies. Since men are never without their bodies, worship is constant. Since bodies are visible, all worship becomes a witness and a proclamation, a lived doxology to God. (Franzmann)

living sacrifice. In contrast to dead animal sacrifices, or perhaps “living” in the sense of having the new life of the Holy Spirit (see 6:4). (CSB)

In the OT, animals were offered by putting them to death. Christ’s one sacrifice replaced the need for such sacrifices (6:10). We can dedicate our entire lives to God. The terms “worship” and “sacrifice” are related to all of one’s earthly life, not simply to time spent in church. “A true and not a false putting to death [mortification] happens through the cross and troubles, by which God exercises us.... They are the spiritual exercises of fear and faith. In addition to this putting to death, which happens through the cross, there is also a necessary, voluntary exercise” (Ap XV 45–46). (TLSB)

When archaeologists unearthed the house-church of Dura Europas in eastern Syria, they learned much about the personal character of early Christian congregations. The rooms would hold no more than 50 people. Humble frescoes decorated the walls, illustrating biblical stories. A wealthy member had either donated the building at Dura Europas or allowed the congregation to gather there. Instead of the “public” character most Christians associate with church today, early Christians would have regarded their gatherings as more personal or private. (TLSB)

In chs 1–11, the apostle Paul describes the personal and fearsome ability of the Law to motivate people. The Law urges us to do good—or else! In contrast, as Paul describes the Christian life for the congregation of Rome (chs 12–16), he seeks to motivate them not with the Law but with the Gospel and with personal care for one another. He asks them to present their bodies as living sacrifices in view of God’s mercy. (TLSB)

Motivated by the Gospel

In 12:1, Paul uses the Greek term *oiktirmon* to move the Roman Christians to active care for one another. This term is plural: “God’s mercies.” In chs 1–11, Paul lists the incredible acts of kindness God had

performed for His people and continued to perform: choosing the patriarchs, rescuing Israel from Egypt, preserving a remnant of believers, and saving both Jew and Gentile through Christ. Paul reminds his readers that God continually has mercy on His people. (TLSB)

The Roman Christians would have immediately recognized *oiktirmon* from the Psalms, which they sang when they gathered for worship. The Psalms of the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) use this word repeatedly to describe the surpassing loving-kindnesses and graces of God. (TLSB)

Most likely, the Roman Christians followed the Jewish prayer custom of requesting God's mercies. When the Romans gathered for prayer and Paul's new Letter was read to them, they would have heard 12:1 in this context. After asking God for His mercies, the apostle's Letter would encourage them—on the basis of those mercies—to sacrifice their lives to the Lord. Rather than intimidating the congregation with the Law, Paul seeks to move his hearers by the mercies of the Gospel. (TLSB)

Transformed by the Gospel

As Paul encourages the Roman Christians with the Gospel of God's mercies, he has both particular goals and general counsel for them. The rest of ch 12 outlines these goals and gives us a picture of what was most needed in the Roman congregation. (TLSB)

Paul begins by urging the Romans to conform no longer to the pattern of this world. The Christian life is one of transformation, leaving behind the former ways and attitudes. Even for the believers who had grown up in the Church, this would be a challenge. The world and its patterns constantly pulled at them, demanding conformity. (TLSB)

As we travel life's road, the patterns of the world work like ruts into which we slip. They pull us down into the ways of self-righteousness, self-interest, and bitterness. Once we fall into such patterns, only God can pull us out. Therefore, Paul urges, "be transformed" (12:2). We trust that the Lord will transform us through the mercies of the Gospel. (TLSB)

Moved to Service

Once the Gospel transforms us, God calls us to greater service. We serve the Lord as He enables us. Each member of the Body of Christ serves with his or her particular gift or gifts. (TLSB)

An unfortunate concern that plagues many churches is that a handful of people usually ends up doing much of the work. Three problems contribute to this situation. First, many people fail to recognize that God wants them to actively serve in the congregation. Second, pride and impatience on the part of some congregation members easily discourages others from serving. People stay at home because they feel that their service is neither needed nor appreciated. Third, most of us keep ourselves too busy. We fill our time with things that do not encourage us or anyone else in the faith. How easily we slip back into the ruts! (TLSB)

Remember the Mercies

As you consider your pattern of life and the pattern in your congregation, remember the mercies of God rather than focusing on the Law. God's Law, though it is holy, righteous, and true, will never properly motivate you or the people around you. God does not want you to conform. He wants to transform you in view of His mercies. (TLSB)

As a Christian, only the mercies of God can properly motivate you to genuine service. When discouraged, certainly remember what God says in His Law. But more important, look for His mercies in your Bible readings, in the services of your congregation, and in your day-to-day life. You are God's precious child. He has given the life of His Son, Jesus, for your salvation. He continues to bless and sustain you each day. Even now, He prepares a place for you in His joyous presence. Therefore, serve willingly—in view of His mercies. (TLSB)

“Therefore” (*oun*) makes the preceding verses and chapters the basis for what follows. “By the mercies of God.” The exhortation that follows is grounded in the mercies (*oiktirmōn*, 9:15) of God in justifying sinners. “Your bodies” are sacrifices. Our bodies are animated by our minds (12:2), so that the sacrifice offered is nothing less than our whole being, body and mind. “Sacrifice” (*thusian*) is modified with four adjectives or adjectival phrases: “living,” “holy,” “acceptable to God,” “your reasonable/spiritual worship.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Christ's sacrifice fulfilled and did away with all sacrifices of atonement and rendered all animal or dead sacrifices obsolete. The sacrifice of our bodies is “acceptable” (*euareston*) through the propitiating sacrifice of Christ (3:25). Because our sacrifice brings honor and praise to God, we seek not to please others or ourselves, but God alone. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Our bodies are a sacrifice, not slaughtered but “living” (*zōsan*), alive to virtues and new life, but dead to sin and vices. They are “holy” (*hagian*), having been washed clean in Holy Baptism and set apart for God's service (6:1–14). The sacrifice of our bodies is true worship, like the daily rites of the Old Testament (9:4; Heb 9:1, 6), a truly “reasonable” (*logikēn*) and “spiritual” (1 Pet 2:5) offering to God. Here is the priesthood of every Christian. The sacrifice is given for the benefit of the neighbor and for the glory of God. Such self-sacrifice for the neighbor is true worship (*latreian*) of God (9:4; 1 Pet 2:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

spiritual worship. Not merely ritual activity but the involvement of heart, mind and will. (CSB)

“Paul has spoken of reasonable service (*logike latreia*; Romans 12:1), namely, of the worship of the mind, of fear, of faith, of prayer, of thanksgiving, and so on” (Ap XXIV 88). (TLSB)

worship. Obedient service. (CSB)

12:2 *not conform...be transformed* – This is an outward molding to fit a pattern. Believers should not be molded by the ways of this world. (TLSB)

Same Gk word is used of Jesus' transfiguration (Mk 9:2–3). God has changed us in Baptism (6:2–4); the passive verb form conveys that God does this work. (TLSB)

“Do not be conformed (*suschēmatisesthe*) to this world,” for “the present form (*schēma*) of this world is passing away” (1 Cor 7:31). This conformity includes our bodies, that is, all that must die and be raised again, like the body of Christ (7:4). We must be transformed, that is, we must become new and different, as Paul says in 2 Cor 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new (*kainē*) creation.” The body is ruled by the mind, so that the transformation of the body must begin with the “renewal (*anakainōsei*) of your mind” (see 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 4:23; Col 3:10). “Reasonable/spiritual worship” (12:1) begins with the mind, that is, with faith and the divine “wisdom and knowledge” (11:33) of Holy Scriptures. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

The purpose clause that follows indicates why the mind must be renewed: “that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” “Good” (*agathon*) indicates the

restoration of the body to its initial and intended state (Gen 1:31). The body is holy and “acceptable” (*euareston*) to God for sacrifice (12:1). “Perfect” (*teleion*) indicates not only that God’s will is flawless, but that it comes to its intended purpose. God’s good and gracious will (*thelēma*, Mt 6:10) is revealed and done in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its mold.” (J.B. Phillips)

The verb tense and mood stress the continuing action necessary to avoid conformity. All the time we must be on our guard against those influences that would force their patterns upon us. (The Hilarity of Community – Marva Dawn)

this world. With all its evil and corruption (see Gal 1:4). (CSB)

be transformed. Here a process, not a single event. The same word is used in the transfiguration narratives (Mt 17:2–8; Mk 9:2–8) and in 2Co 3:18. (CSB)

This transformation therefore involves a perpetual renewal of the mind, making-new of the religious intellect for the life in the new age. In every case, as each case may arise, the child of God is called upon to “prove” the will of God, that is, to weigh and ponder and decide what the revealed will of his Father God is asking of him now. The child knows that will; it asks of him that what he says and does be “good,” that is be a kindly, gracious furthering of the welfare of the man whom God has set beside him as his neighbor. (Franzmann)

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

mind. Thought and will as they relate to morality (see 1:28). (CSB)

God has restored our minds to the manner of thinking He created them to have. (TLSB)

That . After the spiritual transformation just described has taken place. (CSB)

testing. Background of the word involves testing of metals. We are to examine how to live in a manner “acceptable to God” (v 1). The “gold standard” for discerning God’s will is His Word. (TLSB)

will of God. What God wants from the believer here and now. (CSB)

good. That which leads to the spiritual and moral growth of the Christian. (CSB)

acceptable. To God, not necessarily to us. (CSB)

perfect. No improvement can be made on the will of God. (CSB)

12:1–2 Keep Paul’s opening words in mind as you study chs 12–16. He urges us to present ourselves as living sacrifices because it is the proper response to “the mercies of God” (v 1). On this side of heaven, we are not fully renewed (7:14–25). As a result, the exhortations of chs 12–16 show us that we still sin and fall short (3:23). But that is not the only purpose for this section; it is a guide for Christian living (see FC Ep and SD VI). God has shown us His undeserved mercies in Christ. God has transformed our lives in Baptism and continues to renew us daily by His Spirit. • Thank You, heavenly Father, for Your mercies in

Jesus Christ and for the transforming work You began in my Baptism. Empower me by Your Spirit to present my body as a living sacrifice of worship acceptable to You in Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

Gifts of Grace

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,[e] 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.

12:1 *by grace* – Grace is the free, undeserved, and immeasurable gift given to Paul, the chief of sinners, as an example for all of us (1Tm 1:16). (TLSB)

do not think of yourself more highly than you ought – Paul’s office as apostle is a gift of God’s grace (*charitos*; cf. 12:6) for the Church, to speak the Word of God to the Church. Here he teaches that offices, gifts, and works of Christians are to be received and used in humility. “The measure (*metron*) of faith” means that faith brings gifts, which God apportions (*emerisen*) as he wills. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

All men are soloists by nature and inclination; they must learn the art of playing in God’s orchestra. (Franzmann)

sober judgment – We have different gifts and callings, but it is God who calls and gives. Sober judgment recognizes all gifts are from grace. Christ’s humble attitude is the pattern for our thinking (cf Php 2:5–8). Luth: “In God’s presence all must tuck their tails and be glad that they can gain forgiveness. Let no one think that as long as he lives here he can reach such a position that he will not need such forgiveness [1 John 1:8]. In short, if God does not forgive without stopping, we are lost” (LC III 90–91). (TLSB)

measure of faith. The power given by God to each believer to fulfill various ministries in the church (see vv. 4–8). (CSB)

Faith receives gifts of grace from God’s hand (cf v 6). This realization counters the human tendency to be puffed up about one’s gifts. The measure corresponds to one’s calling, as vv 6–8 show. (TLSB)

God has assigned. Since the power comes from God, there can be no basis for a superior attitude or self-righteousness. (CSB)

12:4–8 Paul likens Christians to members of a human body. There are many members and each has a different function, but all are needed for the health of the body. The emphasis is on unity within diversity (see 1Co 12:12–31). (CSB)

12:4-5 The simile of the body (*sōma*) is used in 1 Cor 12:12–30; Eph 1:22–23; 4:4, 16, and elsewhere. The members all belong to the same Body, of which Christ is the head, from whom also they derive their life and fruitfulness (Jn 15:1–9). All Christians are members because they are “in Christ” (12:5). The various members have distinct gifts and different offices, for the sake of others. Each member is to be

content with his own gifts and rejoice in the gifts of others. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

12:5 *one body in Christ ... members one of another.* Cf 1Co 12:13. Members of Christ's body are never alone. We have been joined eternally to Him, as well as to one another (14:7–8). (TLSB)

in Christ. The key to Paul's concept of Christian unity. It is only in Jesus Christ that any unity in the church is possible. True unity is spiritually based. (CSB)

12:6–8 Paul lists grace gifts elsewhere (1Co 12:7–11, 28–30; Eph 4:11–12). Each list is different and provides specific examples. No list is exhaustive; there may be other gifts. The key is to receive all gifts humbly in faith and to use them to serve others. (TLSB)

12:6 *gifts.*† Greek *charismata*, referring to special gifts—freely given by God to his people to meet the needs of the body. (CSB)

Different members of the Body have been given different gifts (*charismata*), not by merit or works, but by God's grace. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

The first gift is prophecy (*prophēteian*)—not new revelation or the foretelling of future events, but the common Gospel proclamation or explanation of Holy Scripture (1 Cor 14:5). This gift is to be exercised according to the analogy of faith. Faith is *fides quae*, the doctrine that is believed. “Analogy” (*analogian*) denotes comparison and right relationship to faith; therefore the preaching accords with sound doctrine. The Church's creeds and confessions have often been called the “analogy of faith,” the pattern of sound words (2 Tim 1:13) by which every sermon is tested. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

prophecy. Mentioned first and highly valued by Paul in 1Co 14. Instead of merely predicting the future, prophecy more often takes God's Word and will (v 2) and applies it to people in their situation. (TLSB)

let us use them. There is to be no false modesty that denies the existence of gifts or refuses to use them. (CSB)

in proportion to his faith. Probably means about the same thing as “measure of faith” in v. 3 (see note there). (CSB)

Cf v 3. The measure is not the gift, but faith, which justifies before God (3:28) and receives all else as gifts from Him. (TLSB)

12:7 *servicing.* Any kind of service needed by the body of Christ or by any of its members. (CSB)

Gk *diakonia*, could refer to specific ministry in the Church or to Christian service in general. (TLSB)

The office of “ministry” (*diakonai*) includes both preaching (Acts 6:4) and service to those in need (Acts 6:2). The office of “teacher” (*ho didaskōn*) is specifically a catechizer in Christian doctrine (1 Tim 4:6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

12:8 Focus of these gifts is their use within the Christian community. (TLSB)

exhortation. Exhorting others with an uplifting, cheerful call to worthwhile accomplishment. The teacher often carried out this function. In teaching, the believer is shown what he must do; in encouraging, he is helped to do it. (CSB)

“Exhortation” (*parakalōn*) is the gift exercised by Paul in Rom 12:1: “I appeal (*Parakalō*) to you . . .” By this appeal, Christians are urged not to grow weary or lazy or negligent, but to be fruitful in good works. The “one who contributes” (*ho metadidous*) brings alms and gifts for the needy and for the church (Eph 4:28) and is to do so freely, with simplicity and generosity of heart (2 Cor 9:13). “The one who leads” or rules (*ho proistamenos*) has oversight over other church offices and thereby serves other offices and the whole Church (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17). He must carry out his office with zeal, not indolence. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

contributes. Giving what is one’s own, or possibly distributing what has been given by others. (CSB)

who leads. Possibly a reference to an elder. The Ephesian church had elders by about this time (see Ac 20:17; 1Th 5:12; 1Ti 5:17). (CSB)

does acts of mercy. Caring for the sick, the poor and the aged. (CSB)

cheerfulness. Serving the needy should be a delight, not a chore. (CSB)

Finally, all Christians are included in “the one who does acts of mercy” (*ho eleōn*). This clause introduces much of the exhortation that follows. All Christians, having received divine mercy, are to have mercy on others. But mercy should be done with hilarity, merriment, and cheerfulness (*hilarotēti*), for it arises out of the “mercies of God” (12:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

12:3–8 God graciously bestows various gifts to be used for the benefit of others. Our abilities can cause us to think of ourselves too highly. Paul urges Christians to avoid that temptation while exhorting us to use God’s gifts to serve others. Paul repeatedly emphasizes the gracious gifts of God that are received in faith. • Thank You, God, for bringing me into the Body of Christ and for the gifts You give to those who have served me in many and various ways. Enlighten me with Your gifts, and empower me to be a living sacrifice, that I may humbly use my gifts to serve others. Amen.(TL SB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 16:13-20

Peter’s Confession of Christ

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.

16:13 *Caesarea Philippi*. To be distinguished from the magnificent city of Caesarea, which Herod the Great had built on the coast of the Mediterranean. Caesarea Philippi, rebuilt by Herod's son Philip (who named it after Tiberius Caesar and himself), was north of the Sea of Galilee, near the slopes of Mount Hermon. Originally it was called Paneas (the ancient name survives today as Banias) in honor of the Greek god Pan, whose shrine was located there. The region was especially pagan. (CSB)

This text places Jesus with his disciples up in the region of Caesarea Philippi, a city some distance from the usual area of Jesus' ministry, and deep in the territory of the Gentiles. The text does not explain why he is there, but the location is important. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

At some distance from the pressures of his Galilean ministry, Jesus asks his disciples an interesting and leading question. We who have heard this before know where it is heading, but try to imagine what it must have been like when the questions were first posed. Jesus asks his disciples what people are thinking about him. We know that throughout Jesus' ministry the disciples had different ideas about him than he himself did (recall, for example, Acts 1:6). You can almost sense their hearts start to race at this question. Is Jesus finally testing the waters? Will he finally declare himself as a messiah and lead the Jewish people? Is he asking the pollster question, the sort of question that potential presidential candidates ask before they launch a campaign? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

do people say – “The people” (oi anthropoi, who saying the things mentioned in verse 14 probably include the general crowds in Galilee as well as various figures with political and/or religious power. Herod Antipas, for instance, has already opined that Jesus is John the Baptizer, whom Antipas beheaded, somehow revived to life again (14:1-2). (CC)

son of man – Outside the four gospels the term “Son of Man” is found only twice in the Scriptures (Acts 7:56; Dan 7:13-14). Jesus, who alone uses the title in the synoptic gospels, preferred this messianic title to any other; but gave it a meaning vastly different from any known understanding. By calling himself “Son of Man” Jesus paradoxically combines the figure of the Suffering Servant, as set forth particularly in Isaiah 53, with the Danielic description of a royal personage. In other words, by using this term regularly of Himself Jesus was stressing the fact that this rule was being established by his becoming a servant – not to God but to human beings. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

16:14 *John the Baptist* – People like Herod thought Jesus must be John the Baptist brought back to life. At least they recognized that John and Jesus both proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God and called people to repentance. (PBC)

other say Elijah – They were familiar with the words of the prophet Malachi: “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes” (Malachi 4:5). (PBC)

still others, Jeremiah – Those, not so sure of themselves, thought Jesus might be another of the OT prophets, perhaps Jeremiah. (PBC)

one of the prophets – The disciples are familiar with current speculations regarding Jesus' identity. In popular belief Jesus is regarded as one in the succession of OT prophets, much like John the Baptist. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

People in Jesus's day expected the reappearance of some notable prophet, but opinions differed as to who this would be (Dt. 18:15; Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6). (TLSB)

The opinions of the people showed that they regarded Jesus very highly as a special man of God, but they did not regard Him highly enough. They did not know Him as the one and only Son of God, Himself true

God with the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity. They were not much different from many people of our own day who praise Jesus as a great teacher but don't know Him as their Savior and the only Savior of the world. (PBC)

Most people, according to the disciples, seem to put Jesus into a prophetic mold, but beyond that agreement, there are a variety of answers. This verse offers a salutary reminder that there was no single, uniform messianic expectation in Judaism in the first century AD. (CC)

It is important to note that, despite similarities between the careers of Israel's prophets and the ministry of Jesus, it is in no way satisfactory or sufficient to name Jesus merely as a prophet of the kind God sent in the OT. (CC)

16:15 *who do you say I am* – The *you* is plural. “Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of apostles, as appears from the text itself. Christ does not ask Peter alone” (Tr 23). (TLSB)

They had been Jesus constantly for more than two years. They had observed how He lived and had witnessed His mighty works, and they had heard Him teach about the kingdom of God and about Himself. (PBC)

Jesus turns the question on the disciples and suddenly the reader understands: this is not a presidential candidate testing the waters, but this is a Savior testing faith. The new question focuses on the disciples. The “*you*” (*humeis*) is in an emphatic position grammatically, beginning Jesus' sentence. In fact, the Greek here does not need the pronoun at all, so its inclusion is highly emphatic. “But *you*, who do *you* say I am?” Jesus has turned the question into a different sort of thing. The issue is not really what the crowds think; Jesus is really interested in what *they* think, what is in *their* hearts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

16:16 *Peter replied* – His was speaking in behalf of the disciples.

Peter blurts out his famous confession, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He is not just a prophet, but the one of whom the prophets are but representatives. Jesus is not just another David, but the King after whom David was patterned. Jesus is not even another Moses, but the one who spoke to Moses out of that burning bush those many years ago. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

the Christ – Jesus was anointed by the Spirit as the Messiah at his baptism. This revelation was confirmed at the Transfiguration. Combined are words for Ps 2, a royal psalm, and language from Is 42:1, the first servant song. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Matthew clearly identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah (1:1, 16, 18). John the Baptist questioned whether Jesus was the Christ (11:2-3). Now Peter, as representative of the Twelve, boldly confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. Hus: “Faith, which properly is the foundation of the church, excelled in Peter” (The Church, p. 84). (TLSB)

It soon became evident, however, that is Peter's understanding of the person and the work of the Messiah left much to be desired. (PBC)

Now, Matthew emphasizes not once (through Simon's words in 16:16) but twice (also through Jesus' concluding command to silence in 16:20) the breakthrough importance of knowing that Jesus is “the Christ,” the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. Although our historical knowledge is limited and any answer I might suggest must be only tentative, the question that the text invites us to answer is this: Why

is this so important? What is the significance of Simon's open, deliberate declaration that Jesus of Nazareth, the unique Son of God, is the Christ? (CC)

I might suggest two things. Perhaps for the first time, Simon has been shown that all of the varied and variegated and (at times) contradictory hopes that are swirling around among the lost sheep of the house of Israel have their true and proper focus in Jesus. "Christ" seems to be a term in Judaism that could be understood quite differently by different parties. It was possible to think (and various groups and individuals in Judaism were thinking) of a royal Christ or a priestly Christ, or maybe even a prophetic one. Whatever the imaginings or wonderings that have sprung up, Jesus is the one who truly fulfills all of Israel's yearnings and gives them their proper shape. I am suggesting that Matthew would have his hearers/readers think of Simon's confession in terms analogous to Paul's statement in 2 Cor 1:20: "for all the promises of God find their Yes in Him" (ESV). Peter has acknowledged that all the hopes of Israel come true in Jesus, God's Son, whom God the Father has anointed. This might be the first new thing about Peter's confession. France has stated it carefully and well: (CC)

But, however limited his grasp of Jesus' actual mission, he has gone beyond the popular acclamation of Jesus as a prophet to the point of recognizing him as not just one among many, not even, like John the Baptist, the greatest of prophets (11:11), but as the one climatic figure in whom God's purpose is finally being accomplished. In that he has made the crucial breakthrough. (CC)

The second possibility flows directly from the first, and I can say it quickly. If Simon is declaring that Jesus is God's Anointed – the one for whom all have been looking, even when they didn't know it – then Simon has also acknowledged that Jesus has been put into a special office, to accomplish the will of God. Kings, priests, prophets – they were all anointed to do something. That is to say, Peter's words are not just about who Jesus is, but they also signal his understanding that if Jesus is the Anointed One, then God has a special work for Jesus to perform. (CC)

Son of the living God – After Jesus came walking on the sea to His disciples, they confessed that He was the Son of God. "Living" emphasizes God is the source of life, as later evidenced in Christ's resurrection. Bede: "He calls Him the "living" God by way of distinction from the false gods which heathendom in its various delusions made to itself to worship, either of dead men, or - greater folly still - of insensate matter" (VB, p. 15). This passage is the climax of chapters 4-16. (TLSB)

16:17 *blessed are you* – Simon is not praised for his great insight; he is pronounced blessed because God the Father has revealed the Son to him. (CC)

Simon son of Jonah – This is Peter's birth name. (TLSB)

revealed...Father – Peter's blessedness is the result that Peter is among those to whom the Father reveals the things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven. Peter's confession is not of human origin. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Peter's confession did not result from his request for a sign (v. 1) or his own superior understanding. He was one of the "little children" to whom the Father had revealed this truth. Hilary of Poitiers: "The Father revealed to Peter that he should say, 'You are the Son of the living God.' Therefore, the building of the Church is upon this rock of confession. This faith is the foundation of the Church" (Tr. 29). (TLSB)

Jesus delights in Peter's answer. He calls it a gift from above, an answer that was put in Peter's mouth by God himself, a divinely inspired answer. This is interesting because in the very next pericope, to be considered next week, we find Peter had this all wrong. He had his own sort of Messiah in mind, most

likely a political ruler, a liberator from Roman oppression. When he expresses this, Jesus calls him “Satan” and casts him aside and behind him. But today, Jesus delights in Peter’s words. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

Jesus knew just how conflicted and confused Peter was about this confession. The words were true, but the man speaking them hardly knew what they meant. It is like a sixth grader reciting $E=mc^2$. He may have the syllables right, the syntax right, the words correct, but does he really grasp what he just said? The following pericope makes clear that Peter does not. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

Yet, Jesus accepts his confession, yes, even delights in it. It reminds of the familiar situation when after we hear a catechumen make the promises of the confirmation rite, our first impulse is to pray. We hear that young person promise to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from this faith, and we turn to God and beg him to help because we really have no idea what might be involved. Still we delight in the promise the young person makes. What is even stranger, God delights in the promises of the confirmand that day, even though he knows that many of those promises will not be kept. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

And in truth, doesn’t this reality of Peter’s confession make sense to us from our own experience? Who can say they have ever promised something to God with a completely pure heart? The old man clings tenaciously to us, and we are always muddled in our motives. But God delights in what we have said in our confirmation vows, baptismal promises, and confessions. He rejoices when we confess Christ to be the Son of God and the solution to our deepest and most profound problems. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

In the same way, those of us who know Jesus as our Lord and Savior have not come to that conviction by figuring that out for ourselves or by making a conscious decision to believe in Jesus. We know Jesus as our Savior only because God the Holy Spirit, through the power of the gospel, has graciously created saving faith in our hearts. (PBC)

Jesus’ teaching here does not negate the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing the Father’s truth about His Son. Jesus teaches that no merely human source, but only divine revelation, can impart true knowledge of the Son. (CC)

Luther’s Catechism Third Article – 1 Corinthians 12:3b

16:18 *Peter ... rock ... church.* † In the Greek “Peter” is *petros* and “rock” is *petra*. The rock on which the church is built is Peter’s inspired (v. 17) confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah, “the Son of the living God.” The Greek *petros*, basically a pebble, is here distinguished from *petra*, a solid rock. Peter, with all his shortcomings, and the disciples (for whom he speaks in his confession) occupy a fundamental position in establishing the church (Eph 2:20). Their position is not one of lordship but of ministry; they are to serve (2Co 1:24; Mt 20:26; 1Co 3:5). (CSB)

Peter’s rock-like confession of faith was the solid foundation on which Christ would build His Church (7:24–27; Eph 2:19–22). “Certainly the Church has not been built upon the authority of a man. Rather, it has been built upon the ministry of the confession Peter made, in which he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (Tr 25). Hus: “Christ is therefore the foundation by whom primarily and in whom primarily the holy catholic church is founded, and faith is the foundation with which it is founded—that faith which works through love” (*The Church*, p 73). (TLSB)

The text goes on to make an astounding promise to us. Upon Peter’s words, the Church will be built and not even hell’s gates will prevail against it. Perhaps we picture this as hell attacking us and our being able

to withstand its onslaught. But the text is the other way around. Gates are defensive. The *Church* is on the offensive here; hell's gates are a useless defense against it being plundered by God through us. Surely this is every time a Christian loves with Christ's love and speaks of him and his kingdom and God works faith in that person through our words. Hell loses another of its victims that day; its gates are broken; another poor person is set free. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 3)

This indicates that the rock on which Jesus will build his church is Peter's confession, not his person. The content of this confession is Jesus himself, so that he is finally the foundation. Jesus builds his church through the means of grace. It is not a human creation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

1 Corinthians 3:11 “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

A remarkably strong case can be made that Peter stands here (as elsewhere) as a representative of other disciples, and specifically, as the representative of the twelve apostles. Consider the following observations: (CC)

In the first place, 16:13-20 itself contains three indications that Peter is acting as a spokesman or representative for the larger group of “disciples” (16:13). (1) All the disciples answer Jesus' first question about who “people” are saying that the Son of Man is. (2) Jesus' next question is emphatically directed to the disciples in the plural, using two Greek second person plural forms: “but you – who do you say...?” (3) Finally, after Jesus finishes speaking to Peter, he orders the entire group of disciples that they tell no one. Presumably, then, Peter's confession was, or had become also theirs (16:20) (CC)

Second, the larger portrait of Peter in the Gospel of Matthew supports this view as well. To be sure, Peter is the leader of the apostles. He is named not only first in order, but is also explicitly called “first” (protos) in 19:2! A survey of the narrative, however, will show how Peter is firmly embedded in the larger company of the disciples. (CC)

church. In the Gospels this word is used only by Matthew (here and twice in 18:17). In the Septuagint it is used for the congregation of Israel. In Greek circles of Jesus' day it indicated the assembly of free, voting citizens in a city (cf. Ac 19:32, 38, 41). (CSB)

The Church is the assembly, or gathering, of all believers. Christ is the builder of the Church, and each individual member is a living stone (1Pt 2:5). This passage and 18:17 are the only times “church” is used in the Gospels. (TLSB)

For this reason Christ addresses him (Peter) as a minister: “On this rock,” that is, on this ministry. Furthermore, the ministry of the NT is not bound to places or persons like the Levitical ministry, but is scattered throughout the whole world and exists wherever God gives God's gifts: apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers (cf Eph 4:11). That ministry is not valid because of the authority of any person but because of the Word handed down by Christ. Chrysostom declares: “Christ says ‘on this rock,’ not ‘on Peter.’ For truly He has built His church not upon the man but upon Peter's faith. But what was that faith? “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And this from Hilary: “The Father revealed this to Peter so that he might declare: ‘You are the Son of the living God.’ Upon this rock of confession, therefore, the church is built. This faith is the foundation of the church.” (LC) (CC)

Hades. The Greek name for the place of departed spirits, generally equivalent to the Hebrew *Sheol*. The “gates of Hades” may mean the “powers of death,” i.e., all forces opposed to Christ and his kingdom (but see note on Job 17:16). (CSB)

Christ acknowledges that during the time when He is building His church upon the apostles and their confession of His, this assembly of disciples will find itself under assault. (CC)

Figure of speech, meaning what causes a person to enter hell (Ps 9:13; 107:18). Bede the Venerable: “The gates of Hell are wicked doctrines, which seduce men and bring them to Hell” (VB, p. 154). Death will not overcome the Church because it rests on the living Son of God (1 Tim. 3:15). “God’s eternal election does not just foresee and foreknow the salvation of the elect. From God’s gracious will and pleasure in Christ Jesus, election is a cause that gains, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what belongs to it. Our salvation is so founded on it that ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (Matthew 16:18)” (FC SD XI 8). (TLSB)

This promise does not, of course, guarantee that any particular congregation or denomination or historical manifestation of visible Christian fellowship or confession will never pass away. Christ’s assembly is here thought of in general terms, as we might say, the *una sancta*, “the holy catholic church.” (CC)

16:19 keys. Perhaps Peter used these keys on the day of Pentecost (Ac 2) when he announced that the door of the kingdom was unlocked to Jews and proselytes and later when he acknowledged that it was also opened to Gentiles (Ac 10). (CSB)

The door of heaven is opened through the forgiveness of sins. (TLSB)

Just as in Is 22:22 the Lord lays the keys of the house of David on the shoulders of his servant Eliakim, so Jesus commits to Peter the Christian – hence to the whole church – the power to loose and bind. Distinguished from the judicial understanding of the rabbis, the power to loose and to bind is the authority to forgive or not forgive sins. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Keys serve two purposes, to lock and to unlock. Here Jesus speaks of binding and loosing. There is really only one key, and the plural indicates the twofold use of the key. The key is the gospel of Christ. That is the only power that frees people from their sins and opens the gates of heaven for them. (PBC)

bind ... loose. Not authority to determine, but to announce, guilt or innocence (see 18:18 and the context there; cf. Ac 5:3, 9). (CSB)

To forgive or to refuse to forgive sins. “Our people are taught that they should highly prize the Absolution as being God’s voice and pronounced by God’s command” (AC XXV 3). “The Keys are an office and power given by Christ to the Church for binding and loosing sin” (SA III VII 1). “These words show that the Keys are given to all the apostles alike and that all the apostles are sent forth alike” (Tr 23). Bede: “Without the slightest doubt it is given to the other Apostles also. Christ Himself bears witness to this, for after the triumph of His Passion and Resurrection He appeared to them, and breathing on them said ‘Receive the Holy Ghost [Jn 20:22]’ ” (VB, p 156). (TLSB)

The authority is given to Peter, but we may confidently state that he represented all the apostles when he spoke to Jesus and when Jesus spoke these words to him. Elsewhere Jesus clearly gives this same authority to the rest of the apostles – and to the whole church on earth. This is what our catechism calls the Ministry of the Keys and defines as the special authority that Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of penitent sinners and to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent. Any Christian who assures a penitent sinner that Jesus died for all his sins and freely forgives him or her is properly exercising this ministry. (PBC)

16:20 *not to tell*. Because of the false concepts of the Jews, who looked for an exclusively national and political Messiah, Jesus told his disciples not to publicize Peter's confession, lest it precipitate a revolution against Rome. (CSB)

There were two reasons for this. First, the people were not ready for this message because they had too many false ideas about the promised Messiah. They expected Him to be an earthly king who would free them from the rule of the Romans and establish a glorious earthly kingdom of Israel. Second, the disciples were not ready to go out with that message because they themselves still held too many of the erroneous ideas about the person and work of the Messiah that were current in the land. After Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the apostles were ready to tell the whole world about Jesus, the Son of God, the only Savior of sinners. (PBC)

Because so many people thought that the Messiah would be a political leader to free them from Roman domination, Jesus likely wanted His disciples to refrain from proclaiming Him as the Christ until after His death and resurrection (Lk 24:46–48). (TLSB)

16:13–20 Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God was a key event in Jesus' ministry. To confess Jesus as Savior and Lord is also essential in every believer's life. Some Christians will remember the very moment this first happened. Other Christians, baptized in infancy, have made this confession again and again in worship and daily life. Like Peter, none of us can by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel (SC, p xxxvii). As royal priests of God, we "proclaim the excellencies of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1Pt 2:9). • Grant us grace, heavenly Father, to confess Jesus and so remain on the unshakable rock of our salvation. Amen. (TLSB)