

“The Holy Catholic Church & Communion of the Saints”

Good morning! It's good to be back in the pulpit. It's really nice to get away with my family for vacation but I truly miss preaching God's Word while I'm gone. I'm always grateful for faithful men who fill the pulpit while I'm away. I'm grateful to pastors Mike and Mark for faithfully preaching the Word the two Sunday's I was away. Many pastors don't have the luxury of ever being out of the pulpit because there's no one to fill the pulpit while they are out. I'm a very blessed and thankful pastor.

Last week I briefly shared with you about some things that happened to our family while we were on vacation. I told you about my dad's breathing troubles, Micki's dad's stroke and Micki's mom's cancer diagnosis. This week Micki's mom went to her first appointment to begin planning what to do about the cancer that's growing inside her. From all reports her doctor was very caring and patient. She spent more than 2 hours with Debbie answering every question she had. Please continue to pray for her and our family as she takes on her next steps.

Alright, we're in week six of our study through the Apostles' Creed. I know that I've said it before but it's important to recap, the Apostles' Creed wasn't actually written by the Apostles. It was written by the church as a way to concisely articulate exactly what we believe as Christians. It's called the Apostles' Creed because it is a summary of the teachings of the Apostles in the Gospels and Epistles.

Through this study I hope you've been able to examine what you believe, why you believe it and better explain your beliefs to anyone who asks. **The truth is belief is all about action isn't it?** When we believe something or in something we act on our beliefs. For example, if we say we believe in the sanctity of marriage yet we are flirtatious and welcoming attention from others then we probably don't really believe in the sanctity of marriage. If we say that we believe in the power of prayer and that God answers prayer and we don't pray then do we really believe in prayer?

More than anything else I pray that the Lord convicts us on what we say we believe and puts our words to the test. I realize that many of you already know much of what I've taught from week to week. To many of you this may only be a refresher causing you to say to yourself, "Oh yeah, I already knew that". But there's a difference between knowing the commands and promises of God and actually living them out.

Belief is a powerful word. It can't be forced on anyone and yet all salvation hangs on what you believe. **The only evidence that can be given if you actually believe what you say you believe is in how you live out your beliefs.**

With all of that in mind, as we've done each week of this series, let's read the Apostles' Creed aloud together. Are you ready? Here we go:

"I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

Last week pastor Mark talked about what we believe about the Holy Spirit. First of all the Holy Spirit is a HE not an it. He is the Spirit of God and is coexistent, eternal and has every other characteristic of God because the Holy Spirit IS God. He comforts us, seals our salvation, convicts us of the Words of Jesus. He leads us to pray and causes us to repent and mourn over our sin. We believe those things about the Holy Spirit because the Word of God teaches us those things about the Holy Spirit.

This week we'll be talking about our belief in the Holy Catholic Church and the communion of the saints. I hope that doesn't cause any of you to question why we, as a Baptist church, would say that we believe in the Holy Catholic Church. However, I'm pretty sure some of you may be wondering about that. I'm not sure if you noticed but in our sermon bumper the people say, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church" and when we read it aloud together before each sermon we read, "I believe in the Holy Christian Church".

Before we dig any more deeply into that, let's dig into our text for the day. Turn with me in your Bible to the Gospel of **Matthew chapter 16**. If you don't have your Bible with you today, any text I read will be on the screens behind me. If you don't have a Bible we'd love to give you one as a gift from Pleasant Hill. All we ask is that you read it and allow God to speak to you as you do.

Again, our passage is found in **Matthew chapter 16 verses 13 through 18**. Let's read that together. *"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.'"*

May God bless the reading of His Holy Word. Will you pray with me? Amen.

What is the Church? I don't mean, what is our church with a lowercase "c". I mean what is the Church with an uppercase "C"? Is this building the church? (show slide of our building). What about this one? (show slide of St. Peter's Basilica). For those of you who don't recognize this building it's Saint Peter's Basilica. It's located in Vatican City in Rome. It has beautiful architecture and artwork. It was painted by Michelangelo. Maybe, that's the holy catholic church that we say we believe in?

Actually, no it's not. That's not even close. Those are buildings where the church gathers. This is the church, (show slide) and this is the church (show slide) and this is the church (show slide). The church that we say we believe in is you and me and everyone else who repents of their sins, calls on the name of Jesus to be saved and lives life eternal glorifying Him.

I could and have, with no reservations, recited the Apostles' Creed by saying that I believe in the Holy Catholic church because I fully understand that by saying that I'm not affirming the catholic church with a lowercase "c", the papacy or anything to do with the Vatican. I know that because I understand that the Church is the body of believers that Jesus has gathered from around the globe.

Pope Julius II was responsible for building Saint Peter's Basilica. Jesus Christ is responsible for building His Church. Let's dig into our passage together. Look with me at the Gospel of **Matthew chapter 16 verses 13 to 15**, "**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.""

I'm thankful for my everyday conversations with Jesus. Three weeks from today pastors Mike and Paul will join me for our annual elder retreat. During that time we'll gather together, pray, meditate and talk about where we see God taking our church and make plans for how to get there. Some might romanticize that type of getaway as a way that God speaks to us. I can't speak for Paul and Mike but I can tell you that retreats like those are impactful and important but they pail in scale to the daily conversations with Jesus that leads me to a deeper walk with Him.

I've been a believer since I was 15. It's hard to fathom how 33 years of my life have come and gone so quickly. I've been blessed beyond all measure. As I look

back over my life I truly treasure the moments I have where the Word of God has shown me truth about God and truth about myself. In everyday reading of His Word the Spirit moves in my heart and mind to lead me into a deeper walk with Jesus.

That's exactly what's happening here with Jesus' disciples. He's having an everyday conversation with them leading them into a closer walk with God by asking them a very simple question. *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"*. It's not as if Jesus doesn't already know who people say that He is. He's asking so the disciples will reflect on what people say about Him and compare that with what they know and have seen in Jesus.

They tell him that some say He's John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Then Jesus makes it personal to them. He asks them, *"But who do you say that I am?"*. One man. Simon Peter, speaks up boldly saying, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*. Peter makes a bold public statement of faith, a statement of belief in who he thinks Jesus is.

Again, saying you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and living like you believe that are two different things. Lots of people have confessed the same thing that Peter confessed and are destined for hell? How do I know? Because Jesus said that on judgement day many will come to Him saying Lord, Lord and He will say to them, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." .

What separates Peter, what separates those who truly believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, from those who will hear Jesus say, *"Depart from me, I never knew you"*? Faith. Belief. **Belief is measured by our actions.** Our actions are controlled by our hearts. Our hearts will never change unless Jesus gives us a new one.

When we believe, when we've truly been changed by Jesus, when we've been given a new heart, Jesus build's His church on that belief. How do I know? Look at **verses**

17 and 18 with me. *"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."* I need to pause here for a moment because it's really important that we understand what Jesus just said before we continue reading through **verse 18**.

If you have faith in Jesus you are blessed by God. He's set you apart and opened your eyes to your sin and His holiness. There's nothing inside of us that would ever choose to see Jesus as savior if it were not for God having mercy on us and letting us see our sin and Christ our Savior! *Flesh and blood, mind and reason, are not enough to see Christ, it takes the Holy Spirit moving in our hearts to open our eyes so we can see.*

Jesus calls Simon Peter, "Simon Bar-Jonah". Some of you may already know the implications of that title, some may not. *It's so important to understand what Jesus is saying when He calls Peter "Simon Bar-Jonah".* Some may think the title "Bar-Jonah" simply means son of Jonah, and on the surface it does, but there's so much more going on here.

Simon Bar-Jonah is also translated as "Simon son of a wine bibber". *A clearer translation of what Jesus is saying here is, "Simon, unstable son of an alcoholic".* Jesus is calling Peter's family, his past to his mind showing the reality that without God opening His eyes and giving him new life, giving him faith, he had no chance of ever professing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God.

What name will Jesus call you when you see Him face to face to remind you that without the grace of God pouring out His Spirit on you and showing you mercy you would never have confessed your sins and believed in Him? *But blessed are you because you didn't have to rely on your flesh and blood which couldn't have shown you Jesus, but you were touched by the Father in heaven who had mercy on you.*

After Jesus declares to Simon Bar-Jonah that he's been blessed, He gives him a new name. Look at **verse 18** with me. *"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."*

There's a couple of things going on here as Jesus calls Simon, Peter. First there's a play on words taking place. The name Peter or "petros" in the Greek means pebble and the word rock or "petros" in Greek means boulder. So essentially Jesus is saying on small amounts of faith or belief in me I will create a mighty foundation on which the church will be built.

The other thing Jesus was telling Simon Bar-Jonah is that he is now a new creation in Him. Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 5:17**, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* **Simon is now Peter.** He's a new creation because of His belief, because of His faith. He's no longer the unstable son of an alcoholic. He's now a piece of the rock on which Jesus will build His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

In **Matthew 7 verses 24 and 25** while talking to the disciples Jesus says, *"24 Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock."*

Jesus said, everyone who hears these words of mine what **what?** "Does them" will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. Hearing isn't enough. Doing is the key to building on the rock. If we hear that building a house on the rock is the only way for it to weather the storm and we say we believe that's true, yet we build our house on sand do we really believe it? No, we don't.

Peter's faith is the rock that Jesus built His church on then and our faith is the rock that Jesus build's His church on now. Our faith, our belief is played out in what we do, not what we say. **Jesus moves us to action because of our belief.** We can

still be nervous or unsure about living as Jesus has commanded us, but belief is based on trusting God that if we live it out He will see us through it all.

This week Micki posted to Facebook her journey in this season of life that our family is going through. If you've not seen it she lists all the trials that we're facing as a family. Because I strive to live a transparent life with you I've already shared most of it with you from this pulpit. In any case, you've heard me preach from this pulpit many times that I believe that any suffering, any heartache or heartbreak we endure this side of heaven will pale in comparison to the glory God receives and will pour out on us as we enter our eternal home. I encourage you to live faithfully, bless God fully in times of blessing and in times of trials because He's leading you through them for a purpose. And here I stand, going through a season of trials, heartache and heartbreak and my faith leads me to say, "Though You slay me, still I will worship. Though You ruin me, I will bless Your name!". I believe that God will see us through and carry us and that belief is built only on the rock of Jesus who called me to be His own.

Jesus uses the faith of those who live faithfully in times of sorrow, loss and suffering to open the eyes of those watching, who don't yet know Him, to build His church. Jesus uses the faith of those who live faithfully in times of blessing and plenty to serve those who are in need to open their eyes of those watching who don't yet know Him to build His church. When Jesus tells Peter, "*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.*" He's telling Peter and everyone who reads His words that Jesus uses the faith of those who love Him to draw other's to Him.

If you want to be a warrior for Jesus who rescues souls from hell, live your faith out loud. Keep His commands in **all** seasons of life. Seek the lost. Love when no one expects you to love. Comfort the brokenhearted. Seek out prisoners and those in jail and offer them comfort. Live what you say you believe because on that rock, on those beliefs, on that faith Jesus will build His church.

All Peter did was answer a simple everyday question that Jesus asked by proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and with that public profession of faith that was given to Peter as a blessing from God Jesus declared how He builds the church.

Look around church. Who's missing? Who's not been here in a long time? Who can we show love to on the streets surrounding our church? Who can we offer comfort to? Understand this, Jesus build's His church through those He's called boldly proclaiming who He is to those who hear it. **Who are you telling?**

So when I recite the Apostles' Creed and I can boldly and uncompromisingly say, "I believe in the Holy Catholic church" not because I'm talking about the Vatican or pope. But because I believe in the universal Church with an uppercase "C" that Jesus is building on the faith and belief of Christians all over the world. I believe in the Holy Catholic Church because I've been a witness to Jesus giving new life to believers all around me for more than 30 years. At Pleasant Hill, we're a small part of a HUGE plan being executed by God through the Holy Spirit as He rescues men and women from hell.

The second half of our "I believe" statement for today is, "I believe in the communion of saints". This belief is more than taking communion together as we do each week, although surely that's part of the meaning.

When I say that I believe in the communion of saints what I mean is that I believe that Christ, who builds His church has drawn our spirit, our soul, into oneness with Him. We are the bride of Christ. Just as when a man and woman are joined together by God becoming one flesh, when we are joined with Christ our souls become one with Him and in Him.

By saying that I believe in the communion of saints, I believe three things. First there is a unity between believers on earth that is supernatural. What I mean is that each of us who have been called by God into unification with Christ is united

in purpose and in love to the Glory of God alone. Look with me at **1 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 4 to 13**. *"4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."

We all drink of one Spirit, but God gifts us to fulfill His will for our lives as He sees fit. The communion of saints involves each of us realizing that our calling, our purpose is given to us by God and when we withhold or refrain from obeying God we're harming the entire body of Christ.

This week Spencer had an ear infection. He had a fever of 102 and lost about 8 pounds. He lost his appetite and vomited for about 24 hours until we took him to the doctor and he started antibiotics. What does the ear have to do with the stomach? A lot apparently. It's a closed system and even an infection in the ear affects the entire body. We see that in nature, but we lose sight of it in the church.

If we really believe in the communion of saints then we will live our lives on mission knowing that what we do or do not do has an effect on other saints worldwide. And more locally and more immediately what you do or do not do has an effect on the

members of PHBC and your family. As believers, we're united in spirit. What we do affects those around us. I believe that. Do you?

The second thing I mean when I say that I believe in the communion of saints is in the church triumphant. Our communion extends far beyond this world and time. It extends into the saints that have gone before us and those who will come after us. When Jesus said that He will build His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, I believe that He meant it. There is a special communion that exists between those who have gone before us and lived by faith urging us to fight the good fight, finish the race and keep the faith.

Paul recounts hero after hero in **Hebrews 11** who in what many of us call the "Hall of Fame of Faith". By saying I believe in the communion of saints I mean that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Sarah, Paul, Timothy, John and so many others are all communing with us through the Spirit of God.

They're not communing with us in a sense that we pray for them or they pray for us but in the way that they are united with us in Christ. The hero's of our faith, the men and women who have gone before us lead the way towards faithful execution of God's will in our own lives. Their lives were lived in such a way that it calls us and encourages us to live what we believe. And in the end God's church will reign forevermore with Him as one.

The third thing that I believe when I say that I believe in the communion of saints is I believe that the saints have a special communion with God that doesn't exist anywhere else in the universe. I believe that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved and becomes a child of God.

Let's wrap up our time together by looking at **1 John chapter 3 verses 1 to 3**. "1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet

appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”.

I believe in the communion of saints in that we have a special relationship with God and have become His children. That’s an amazing statement. It’s why I can call you my brother and my sister because in and through the blood of Jesus we were adopted as the children of God and so you are my brothers and sisters. We have a supernatural communion together as God’s children. We read in **1 Peter** that angels long to get a glimpse of the communion that exists between us and God. They don’t get it. They don’t understand it. But it exists because God chose to pour out his grace on us.

With the understanding what the communion of saints means I hope it takes on more significance to us as we receive the Lord’s Supper today. Yes the primary reason to receive the Lord’s Supper is to remember the body of Jesus that was crushed for us and the blood of Jesus that was poured as payment for our sins, but while you’re remembering Jesus, remember the communion that exists between you and your brothers and sisters in Christ, the communion that exists between you and the saints whose faith has pointed you towards Jesus and the communion that exists between you and the Father because of Christ’s great love for you.

We’re going to begin a time of response.