

The Key (Matthew 16:13-20)

When I arrived at Hayes two years ago, one of the first things I was given were bunches of keys to each of the churches. There were so many that I felt like a gaoler. I had to spend a morning in each church trying to work out which key opens which door. And after two years I think I have worked out most of them!

In this passage from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells Peter that he will be given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. But there is much more that is 'key' to this passage.

Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" After some of them suggest John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets, it is Peter who professes "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

This is key to our understanding and identity. The church and every disciple (including you and me) is rooted in the confession that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of God. This is what makes the church and every disciple so distinctive. It's not our ability, it's not our courage, it's not our understanding, it's not even our faith. (Peter in the next few verses shows that he is guilty of such colossal misunderstanding that Jesus calls me Satan - Matthew 16:21-23). But that doesn't mean Jesus takes the keys away from Peter. Peter, the church, you and me can draw distinctive from this confession that claims us. It is key to who we are. It is key to our identity.

This insight about Jesus comes as an event of divine revelation. Peter isn't reasoning his way to his declaration about who Jesus is. Logic could never work out that the person who is destined to die on the cross is fulfilling his role as the Son of God. This comes not just out of a step of faith, as a divine gift of grace. Grace - God-given love that we live in and love out.

So there is something that is key and crucial to understanding, but there is another sort of key. There is the key that Jesus talks up - the physical key that locks and unlocks doors. This is about security. And it is about authority too. The keys of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus gives to Peter are a symbol of the authority that Church invests in his disciple.

Those words "you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" are words that provide a security for us. Biblical scholars have debated whether it is Peter who is the rock on which Jesus will build the church, or whether it is the words on which Jesus will build the church. But the fact is that when we confess, acknowledge that "Jesus is the Son of the living God", it is something which gives us security.

Yet there is another sort of key

I have a love/hate relationship with home decorating. I mean I love painting - putting a new fresh coat of paint on the wall and seeing the room transformed. What I don't like is all the preparation that has to happen before you get to that point - the washing down of walls, the sanding down of woodwork etc. But you have to do this, because you need to give the paint a key to hold onto - otherwise the paint will drip and slip and the result will look shoddy and terrible.

The key gives the paint something to grip to. And that phrase again that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God", gives us something to hold onto. It anchors us.

Holding firm and strong to how Jesus is and what that means, means we can hold firm in the storms and troubles of life. It doesn't mean that we won't be battered or bruised but in the midst of everything Jesus is the one we can grip onto. He is our key. It is something that we can build upon.

“You are the Messiah, the son of the living God”.

- Words that are key to our identity as followers of Jesus and people of faith.
- Words that provide keys of security in that we are sons and daughters of God.
- Words that provide a key that we can grasp onto when things are difficult, and build upon as we live our lives as people of faith.

Prayer for the Week

Mighty God,
I think about the keys I hold.
Each one shows a responsibility of some kind.
Thank you for all that you entrust me with.
Thank you most of all for Jesus,
 who gives me the keys of the kingdom.
For you, Jesus are the Messiah,
 the Son of the living God. Amen.

(adapted from Roots)
