

Worship for 23 August 2020 [ctrl + click for recording](#)

Introduction

We are nearly into September when we will be opening our church for worship and for some groups who use our buildings. The theme today is about Jesus naming Simon as Peter and giving him the keys to the kingdom. We have had the church locked to us for many months and F&B and elders have been looking at what has to be done to unlock it all for us safely. Several of us have the keys to physically unlock the building to access various parts of the building but few have a full set mainly because there are so many. We all hold the keys to God's kingdom but for some we have to find the lock to put them into.

Hymn Let all the world in every corner sing

Prayer

Lord, do we really believe that we are in the presence of the Son of the Living God? Still our hearts now, so that we may truly appreciate who you are. As we hear these words of power, we bow down before you and praise you. When Jesus asked, Simon Peter answered: 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' Let us make the same bold answer, and let us come together to worship Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus said to Simon, 'This was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.' The Lord blessed Simon because he finally understood who Jesus was. He called him Peter, and said that great things would come to pass through him. He promised him the keys to the kingdom. Lord, we already have so many keys on our bundles. Help us to find the right ones to open the doors you choose for us. Make us ready to be like Simon, and to become Peter, doing great things in your strength and for your kingdom. Lord God, we come before you in humble adoration. How blessed are we that the one who holds the keys to the kingdom of heaven is the one who has the key to our hearts. Thank you, God, for the privilege of being part of the amazing story of faith that sustained our ancestors. Thank you, God, that we know our future is safe with you, Lord, thank you that you are always ready to forgive us when we trust you Enough to confess our sins to you,

even when we feel we don't deserve it. Forgive us for the times when just because someone else's story is different from ours we don't always want to believe it. Forgive us for the times we only live our story, not seeing the bigger picture. Forgive us for the times we see you as less than the Son of God, and our whole outlook on life needs to be done in your love and understanding.

Be merciful to us, O God. Amen

Reading: Matthew 16.13-20

Reflection

Who holds the keys to unlock the good news?

Jesus has taken the disciples a long way north to the city of Caesarea Philippi. This is the seat of Roman rule through a puppet king – Herod the Great's son, Philip. He had built the city, naming it as he did to distinguish it from Caesarea Maritima where the Roman governor lived. For Jews the newly renamed city of Caesarea Philippi is a blasphemous, idolatrous horror, a headquarters of the foreign rulers and a symbol of oppression. There, in temple and inscription, Caesar is worshipped as 'Saviour', 'Son of God'. Jesus went there, another rough area where one does not expect Jesus to go, to ask pointedly political questions about his identity First named in a list of those the crowds thought Jesus might be is John the Baptist, executed by Philip's brother. But the others – Elijah and Jeremiah – were political troublemakers in their own time.

In this charged atmosphere, Jesus asks the twelve who they think he is. Peter shoots back, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. In the shadow of the walls of the seat of government, where there was a king, this was dangerous talk. But like the voice at his baptism and on the mount of transfiguration, Jesus confirms that Peter has spoken God's view on the matter. The keys unlock Simon's mind so he gives the answer Jesus requires.

Is this where Jesus gives Simon the nickname 'Rocky'? It is possible. More importantly, is it Peter or his confession that is the rock on which Jesus will build his Church? Surely the latter: the Church is founded on the simple confession of faith that Jesus is Lord. But this is not just a religious matter; it is a political one. Caesar was 'Lord',

and in his empire there could be only one Lord. So, if Peter was saying that Jesus is Lord, then he is also saying that Caesar is not. More startlingly, Jesus says that not only will he build his Church on this confession, but that the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. The gates of Hades are kept locked. Is this about breaking in or breaking out? Again, surely the latter. This confession means that this little band will break out of Caesar's empire and take countless thousands with them. But not only will God's people be set free by their confession of allegiance to king Jesus, they will also hold the keys to God's kingdom. This administrative image indicates that the disciples will organise life in their movement to ensure that everyone enjoys the liberating benefits of the confession.

The unusual syntax of verse 19 – the verbs are future perfect passives – suggests that what we do, heaven has already determined should happen. This dangerous saying suggests that as Jesus' followers seek the guidance of God they will receive it, and in following it will show the world the liberating message of the king they follow in distinction to the restrictive rule of Caesar's empire.

And then Jesus tells them to keep this all under wraps! The time will come for shouting it from the rooftops – but not yet.

We are still under some lockdown restrictions and we pray that the keys to unlocking everything will be found so we can crossover to the new normal.

What keys do you hold? Not just the physical keys to your front door, your car or your treasure chest but also symbolic keys. We all have the keys to the kingdom but are we aware of how to use them and show the wonder of the kingdom to others. Maybe our keys are a bit rusty or have got bent over the years but they can be cleaned up and straightened – just ask for God to enlighten you to see how to improve the state of your keys and to find the locks. Pray and read the Bible and talk to others to find the inspiration to go forward and unlock the doors. Amen

Prayers for the people

Let us pray

We pray for people who struggle with their faith: through self-doubt, through difficult circumstances, through bad things happening,

through being led astray, by wanting fame and fortune. We pray they find the key to seeking your help.

We pray for people who feel in the dark, locked in a situation where they can find no answer, that they might come to understand that you are the key to everything they need.

We pray for ourselves: when we are in difficult situations, when we try to unlock doors that aren't ours to unlock, when we don't focus on the kingdom, when we don't share our story. We pray for that time when we are not behind locked doors but open to all your love and care.

We ask that you stay close to support all those who need your love as they experience difficult circumstances be it physical, mental or spiritual and be with those who can help them unlock the doors to healing. In a moment of silence we bring to you our concerns. We trust you, Lord, to answer our prayers.. Your will be done, O Lord. **Amen**

Let us say together the words our Lord taught us .. Our Father ...

Hymn God is love let heaven adore him

Offertory prayer

Lord we ask your blessing on the gifts of money given in the different ways we can and on those people who serve you and the church in many ways now and in the time to come

Blessing

Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone he was the Messiah, people had to discover that for themselves. We go out now, hearts so full of amazement and joy, that we can't help but share the good news. Go with us, good Lord, and help us to tell everyone who will listen and unlock the good news of knowing you. **Amen.**

(Worship prepared by Ann Evans)