

## Sermon August 23, 2026

### Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was<sup>[d]</sup> the Messiah.

*Let us pray: Holy God, meet us now at the water's edge. Calm our fears, steady our hearts, and open us to the courage your Spirit gives. Let the stories of your people and the truth of your Christ take root in us— calling us toward compassion, toward justice, toward the brave welcome of your kingdom.*

*Speak to us and make us ready to follow. Amen.*

### Courage at the Water's Edge

There are moments in life when we find ourselves standing at the water's edge. Encountering places where something must be risked, something must be released, something must be trusted, something must be done that cannot be undone.

When I was young, I had a reoccurring dream. Like many dreams, it starts with what is familiar. I walk on Lake Michigan beach that was a mile from my childhood home, enjoying the peace and beauty. Suddenly, I hear a roar and I turn towards the water. The tide is coming in. Despite the fact that there is no tide in the lake. The water is rushing forward, faster and faster... and everyone around me begins to run. I try to run away too, but I keep slipping in the sand. Sometimes I have a baby or my dog with me, and they

slow me down too. Desperate, feeling the water on my toes, I run faster and faster. I finally jump in my car, but no matter where I turn, I keep heading straight back towards the water.

And I would wake up with my heart pounding and the sound of the rushing water in my ears.

Water can be both threatening and lifegiving. The water's edge is a threshold. A place where fear and hope meet. A place where courage becomes necessary.

Joseph rose to power during a time of drought... where the lack of water threatens the people's very existence. But 200 years later, the people forget. Jacob's 12 sons have prospered and their descendants live throughout the land. Pharaoh fears their impact on his country... they are seen as immigrants who will bring about change and new ideas. And as so often happens when a political leader feels threatened, he lashed out to this small group of migrants. He fears losing control. And, fear shrinks the world. Fear limits who belongs. Jacob's descendants are enslaved and God's covenantal promises are slowly forgotten.

The story of God's liberation begins with a group of women whose courage interrupts the machinery of empire. These midwives, stand at the water's edge... decades before the seas part... generations before the people cross the Jordan to the Promised Land. These women are told to participate in death... to kill baby boys before they have a chance to grow up. These women choose life. They refuse Pharaoh's command, quietly, boldly, faithfully.

And they open up a pathway for Moses' mother, who places her child in a basket and watches him float away. Instead of running away from the rising waters, she chooses to trust it's life giving gifts. This is a desperate act, a holy act... trusting that the river might carry him toward a future she cannot yet see.

Miriam stands watch, heart pounding, ready to speak, ready to intervene, ready to do whatever courage requires. And then another woman enters the

story.... Pharaoh's daughter sees a crying baby. She knows exactly what her father has ordered, but she chooses compassion.

Every one of these women stands at the water's edge and chooses courage over fear, welcome over exclusion, life over death. Liberation begins with their defiant welcome.

Liberation takes courage, too.

Jesus brings the disciples to Caesarea Philippi, a place known for imperial power and competing gods. This is not a neutral location... they stand on a shoreline of identity and allegiance.

And Jesus asks a water's edge question: "Who do you say that I am?"

The answer requires courage because it reveals who we are becoming. A choice that can pull us under or bring New Life.

Peter steps forward. The man who walked on water... and also began to sink... speaks up with courage: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus blesses him, names him, and calls him a rock... not because he is strong, but because he is willing to step forward when the moment requires it. This is the foundation of a movement that extends for generations.

We, too, stand at water's edges. We can run to safety or we can face it... and our fears. Courage at the water's edge is rarely dramatic. It is often quiet, steady, persistent. When we refuse to participate in harm... when we protect the vulnerable. Courage looks like telling the truth. It looks like compassion towards a vulnerable child. In courage, we are called to name Christ as the One who calls us into justice, mercy, and love.

And sometimes courage looks like placing something precious— a hope, a calling, a relationship, a community— into God's hands and trusting the river to carry it.

Today, we stand at our own shoreline. We are discerning who we are and who we are becoming. We are listening for Christ's question: "Who do you say that I am?"

Let us answer with our lives and proclaim:

- Christ is the One who welcomes without fear.
- Christ is the One who calls us to justice.
- Christ is the One who gathers the vulnerable.
- Christ is the One who breaks open compassion.
- Christ is the One who leads us toward liberation.
- Christ is the One who calls us to offer an extravagant welcome to everyone, no exceptions.

Every act of welcome we offer— every prayer for peace, every meal shared, every child blessed, every neighbor embraced— is courage at the water's edge.

The good news is this: God does not ask us to be fearless. God asks us to be faithful. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is the decision that fear will not have the final word.

The midwives were afraid. Moses' mother was afraid. Miriam was afraid. Pharaoh's daughter was afraid. Peter was afraid.

But they acted anyway.

And God met them at the water's edge and God meets us there too.