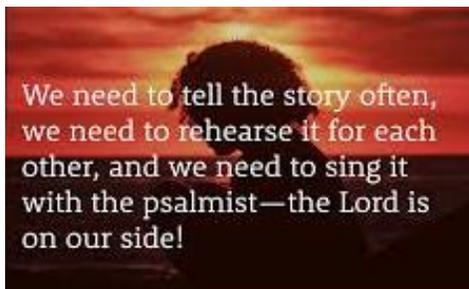


## First Baptist Church of Fitchburg

1400 John Fitch Highway Fitchburg, MA 01420 Phone# 978-345-5622

August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020, 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor: Rev. Meredith H. Christian      Musician: Marilyn Cater      Song Leader: May Goff



### **Welcome and Announcements:**

Good morning Congregation. It was so wonderful to see so many of you carefully and safely worshiping together this past week. For those of you still at home, please know that we pray in unity with you and respect your need to care for yourself and your family in the way that best supports your current circumstances. Please feel welcome to reach out to a member, myself or each other in whatever safe way you may and let us know how we may best support you during this time.

We will be taking a one time, special offering this week in order to support the endeavors of Oceanwood Camp and Conference center as they seek to safely support their community with an education program this fall. Office hours and Bible study will resume this week. You are still welcome to share your concerns and celebrations with me or your deacons. My email is [meredithhchristian@gmail.com](mailto:meredithhchristian@gmail.com) and phone (774) 276-0505.

### **Call to Worship:** (In Unison)

**We may, or may not have the common bond of race, or nationality, language, culture, or social position, but we do have a common bond as fellow believers. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we bow together before God in mutual worship and praise of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.**

### **Invocation:**

It is easy, Lord, to see things so narrowly that we believe that true theology can only be expressed in a certain way, that true praise can only be sung in a certain style, and that true faith can only be experienced by certain people. Help us, throughout this hour of worship, to experience the height, depth, and width of Your grace, through the inner workings of Your Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Gloria Patri:**

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
World without end. Amen, Amen.*

**Hymn:** “If You Will Trust In God To Guide You” # 429 (Click on link) <https://youtu.be/9rA1lIK4eg4>

(Option two. Lyrics included) <https://youtu.be/vFfYKN6Jw1o>

### **First Reading:** Psalm 124

*“If the LORD had not been on our side—let Israel say—if the LORD had not been on our side when people attacked us, they would have swallowed us alive when their anger flared against us; the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept us away.*

*Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”*

**Celebrations and Concerns:** Prayers for one of our former beloved pastors here at FBC Fitchburg, that she may fully recover and have peace in the midst of her health struggle. Prayers for peace and healing.

**Silent Prayer:** May we humble ourselves in silence before the Lord.

### **Pastoral Prayer:**

We admit, Lord, that we do not often love our neighbors as You require. We may not get along with them or may not see them very often, or perhaps we fail to see them at all. Yet we know that our neighbors are Your children. They have joys, and needs, crises, and successes. They have families, jobs, hobbies, and interests.

We pray, Father, for whatever difficulties our neighbors are experiencing. These may be physical, mental, financial or relationship problems, but in any case they need Your help. We ask that they receive Your healing, guidance, comfort, and direction for their lives, even as we ask the same for ourselves.

Help us Father, in our relationships with those who live around us. Help us to be friendly, to smile, to be helpful, and to portray a positive image of the Christian faith. Open our eyes to see where we can help, and open our hearts to be loving in all our relationships, we pray in the name of Your Son Jesus, who taught us to pray,

***Our Father**, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

**Children's Message:** (Offered by Debi Cross)

## Fred's not so Good Day

Have you ever flown in a plane? Was it fun?

Well, today's story is about a man named Fred who always wanted to fly in a plane. So one day he went over to Norwood airport, hopped on a plane, and took off. The plane was a little plane with two engines – one on each wing.

Unfortunately, while Fred was flying around the countryside, one of the engines conked out! Fortunately, there was still another engine, so the plane could still fly. Unfortunately, after a while the other engine conked out, too!

Fortunately, he was wearing a parachute, and he jumped out of the plane. Unfortunately, the parachute didn't open, so he began falling like a rock! Fortunately, he was over a lake, so instead of landing on the hard ground, he landed in the water.

Unfortunately, Fred didn't know how to swim. Fortunately, a man in a boat came along and pulled Fred out of the water. Unfortunately, the boat sprang a leak and began to sink. Fortunately, the man with the boat knew how to swim, and he pulled Fred to the shore. Whew!

There sure were a lot of good things and bad things in Fred's day, weren't there? But, you know, life is like that. There are times when things are good, and times when things are bad. But there are things that are always good. God is always good. And God's love for us is always good.



Here's what it says in Psalm 107 (verse 1): "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever."

No matter how bad things get, God is good, and he always loves us.

Let's pray about that: Dear Lord, sometimes we have good days, and sometimes we have bad days. Thank you for always loving us no matter what. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

Let's pray about that: **Prayer:** *Dear Lord, sometimes we have good days, and sometimes we have bad days. Thank you for always loving us no matter what. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

## **Blessing of the Tithes, Offerings and Gifts:**

As we give, let us remember that we can only give because God first gave to us.

Heavenly Father, we present these gifts in gratitude and humility, because we are giving in response to Your goodness towards us. May you bless these tithes, offerings and gifts and those who have given out of love for those in need, and who have given in the hope that You will multiply their seeds and allow them to grow into an abundance of provision for this neighborhood, this city, this nation and this, Your world, in honor of Your Son Jesus, and through the power of Your Spirit. Amen.

(Tithes, offerings, and gifts are greatly appreciated as a means to continue to care for our facilities, the needs of each other, and our local and worldwide community. We thank you for your pledges at this time and ask that you **Please Pray over your gifts** and mail them to the church at **1400 John Fitch Hwy, Fitchburg MA 01420**).

## **Doxology:**

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

*Praise Him all creatures here below*

*Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts*

*Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost.*

### ***“What Did You Call Me?”***

*“I am a C, I am a C-h, I am a C-h-r-i-s-t-i-a-n. And I have C-h-r-i-s-t in my H-e-a-r-t and I will L-i-v-e-E-t-e-r-n-a-l-l-y”*. This is a song that has been sung by children, not only at Oceanwood, but at Christian camps across this nation and others around the world from the time of its release in 1993 by the Cedermont Kids. (*For those of you reading this on-line, I leave you a link to their video and a warning that this song sets in like an earworm that keeps you humming it for days.* <https://youtu.be/p-0dbWaqiWI>). It is a simple song, that reflects a simple, yet important truth about what it means for those of us who call ourselves Christians, for to be called by the name of Christ, is to publicly declare that one has asked Christ to live within our heart, and to hold fast in faith to the fact that by doing so, we hold the promise that we will live eternally with Him in His kingdom.

This is the root of Christianity, yet what of the tree and all its many branches? For some, to be called a Christian is no more than a designation. I am a female, I am short, I am of English and Lithuanian decent. These are the traits that I have inherited from my ancestors, characteristics of which I have little to no control. I am a Christian because my ancestors were Christians.

Some wear the title of Christian as if it were a badge of honor, displaying it proudly as they loudly announce to any and all within ear shot that they are somehow more qualified to be present or in the given task *because* they have put in the time, done the work and earned the right to be called Christian, and they won't let you or anyone else forget it.

Still others use the term Christian as a curse word. God knows why. Perhaps because they, or those they love have been wounded in the past by one of the aforementioned people who have left the name Christian as a calling card or an excuse for poor or hurtful behavior, “in the name of the Lord”, I am ashamed to say, or my personal least favorite, they have been harassed or mistreated by someone with a Jesus bumper sticker or t-shirt, leading to the all too common phrase, “They say they are a Christian, but...”. I am sure everyone of you can fill in the blanks of that horrid little sentence.

All this is to ask the question; particularly today, in this current climate of labels, titles and chants heard in the streets that call on each of you to pick a team, pick a title: choose a camp and defend yourselves, beloved congregation, what does it mean that we should call ourselves Christians?

For Christians you are, and each of you are first and foremost here today, I pray, to worship God and to hear His Word above all else being spoken. You are here in the hope that what God has to say in His Word might bring you clarity or comfort in this current climate of unrest. So let us turn to the Word of God and seek His ways and will for each of here today.

**Sermon Text:**

***Matthew 16:13-20 (NIV)***

*“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”*

*They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”*

*“But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?”*

*Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”*

*Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then He ordered His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah.”*

To unpack all of the important truths contained within this text would take many weeks, and more intelligent beings than myself, so for the sake of valuing your time and your intelligence, as I am confident you can well make out many of God’s truths contained in the Gospel for yourselves, I will focus today on only a few small aspects, and one simple question. What are we saying when we call ourselves Christians?

In order to get the full picture of what I have read we must first look back to the beginning of this chapter. Chapter 16 opens with the Pharisees and Sadducees trying to tempt Jesus by getting Him to prove who He was through signs and parlor tricks. This same spirit that led these respectable leaders in the community to tempt Christ to justify Himself was first witnessed in the desert with Jesus at the beginning of His ministry when, “the devil said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread’” (*Matthew & Luke 4:3*), and would come up again at the cross in the form of protesters, demonstrators and even one of the criminals by His side when they mocked Him with taunts such as, “If You are the Son of God, Come down from the cross!” (*Matthew 27:40*).

From the start of His earthly mission to the end of His human, earthly body, Jesus was continually called on and called out to prove who He was to others. “Prove it, prove it, Prove it!”, they cried. Has this ever happened to you? Personally, I cannot think of a time, age, or situation where I was not at some point called on by others to define or justify myself.

I was my mother’s baby, and my dad’s little turkey. I was my brother’s little sis, and the youngest of the cousins. I was a friend to some of the kids in my neighborhood and a source of amusement and teasing to others. I was a village kid, a noisy student, a mostly cooperative patient, a little brat, and a big help. As I grew older I became a New Englander, a pain in the back side, one of those teens, a favorite babysitter to some, and a loyal fan of the bands some of my friends played in, and all the while, I was searching for the ultimate question of all humanity, “Who am I and why am I here?”.

I became a wife, a mother, a productive worker, a complete mess. I have been so many things, to so many people that I could not possibly list them all. Who I am is complicated. Most of my life I have called myself a Christian. To be a Christian in my youth meant for me to have said that little prayer in Sunday School that I agreed with the fact that Jesus was God, and He could and would save me, and that I was sorry for what I had done and would try to do better. As I grew up, that basic identity has not really changed for me, although time has changed how I have seen God, and who I did and now believe He is, as the Great and Holy I Am. God has not changed, but my perception of Him has, even as other’s perception of me has changed throughout my life.

Who do you say I am? How do you define me? For we all hold an idea, an impression of what we think of others based on our interactions, our assumptions, our intuition and the comments and actions of others, even as you are defined in these ways as well. Such is human nature, to define ourselves in relation to others, and others in relation to ourselves. Are you better or worse, richer, or poorer, smarter or in better health?

Even now, we are called out by the American media to prove who we are and what we believe by saying what some want us to say and performing actions that others deem appropriate. They say, “If you are part of our political party, prove it”, “If you are a decent person, Prove it” by performing designated actions or comments. They say, “If you care, you will”, and “If you love me you won’t”. As if we needed to prove such a thing as who we are, what we are or where we come from by a magic trick or phrase. It is repugnant!

Who do you think Jesus is? Some say Jesus was a “good guy”, “a prophet”, “a peace maker of his day”, or a “good person”, but that is all they see in Him, just a, “Wise, religious man who lived and died a long time ago, like Gandhi, Muhamad, Confucius or Buddha”. Those that see Jesus as just another prophet who has come and gone, leaving humanity ancient wisdom, leave *themselves* with the ability to choose whether or not to actually act upon what He said, or emulate the way that He lived. If He is not the King of Kings, then why follow Him?

People do not get to define Jesus, nor will I allow them define me. People said I was scrawny, sickly, slow, and too loud, but I serve a God who calls me strong in His mighty strength (*Ephesians 6:10*). He says that by His stripes, I am healed (*Isaiah 53:5*). He bestows upon me wisdom, knowledge, and Joy (*Ecclesiastes 2:26*), that the Lord gives generously and without reproach to His own as I ask Him (*James 1:5*). He calls me beloved.

Jesus is Lord, and as Creator of all, He does have the right to define His creation. God encourages His people to call out with a loud voice that although this world and life will one day fade away, the Word of God and His Mercies do and will endure forever, and that Jesus *is* coming back to restore justice and righteousness (*Isaiah 40:6-8, Psalm 136:1*), and the “God of all grace, who called me to His eternal glory in Christ, after I have suffered a little while, will Himself restore me, and make me strong, firm and steadfast” (*1 Peter 5:10*).

He will do these things for you, and *every other* person, of every race, creed, gender, color, shape, size and age who trust in the fact the Jesus is Lord, that He has completed the tasks required for our salvation and that He alone not only had and continues to hold all power and authority in heaven and on earth (*Matthew 28:18*), but also has already given His very own “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (*Matthew 16:19*) to His Church.

Who is His Church? Who have been given all this power and authority to effect change in this earth? That would be you, beloved; you who are called by His name, and who actually do the will of the Father in heaven (*Matthew 7:21*). God calls you Christians, all who believe in Him and do His will comprise His beloved Bride (*Ephesians 5:25-30*), “For your Maker is your husband-the Lord Almighty is His name” (*Isaiah 54:5*), and His Bride is still and always will be the Church (*2 Corinthians 11:2*).

Some things never change. Like it or not, each of us will always be defined by others. Christians have been questioned about their faith by being asked to prove their beliefs in their words, actions, and lives for millennia. Just as the Israelites were and are, “a people set apart as holy for Adonai, God, chosen as His own unique treasure” (*Deuteronomy 7:6*), so too, have those who take on the title of Christian been set apart as different, and expected to act differently than those around them who do not have a personal relationship with Christ.

Those who have asked Jesus to forgive their sins, come into their heart and be their Lord and Savior, those who have trusted in the shed blood of Christ, have forever been, “set apart as holy because Jesus Christ did what God wanted Him to do by sacrificing His body once and for all.” (*Hebrews 10:2*). So too Christians are justified by Christ and work out their sanctification through emulation of their King and Messiah, Lord Jesus.

I am a Christian. It is God who defines who I am, and the parameters of my life until His return, even as He has bestowed upon me the freedom to choose whether or not to live up to His expectations and whether or not to receive His blessings. I do not need to wear a t-shirt or a hat in order to accomplish the will of God for my life or accomplish the mission set be for me. I will not perform parlor tricks or chant pre-recorded phases in order to prove to the masses that I am a child of God. My soul has *already* been secured in Christ, and let me be clear, with that knowledge, comes both security and the responsibility of choosing my words and actions wisely.

Those that come in contact with me had sure better know that I am a Jesus follower by my responses to them and the world around me. They should know I am a Christian by my love for them. It should be obvious in the way that I drive, how I address people and what I chose to do with my time that I am serving the Living God, and not the interests of others, or even my own. I have no intention of living a safe life. I live a saved one.

My loyalty lies in Christ, His kingdom and running the race He has set before me with endurance as I look to Jesus, and Him alone, as the author and perfecter of my faith, who Himself endured scorn and shame for our sake and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God (*Hebrews 12:1-2*). I can accomplish the tasks He has set before me, and so can you, not by our own effort or in our own merit, but through the accomplishment of Jesus on the cross and the power and authority He has given His own. What was given is meant to be used.

When Jesus said to Peter, the Rock and foundation of the Church to come, “whatever you bind on earth *will be* bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth *will be* loosed in heaven.” (*Matthew 16:19b*), He was not only transferring power and authority but also commissioning His followers to action. Perry Stone explains;

“to bind something was to forbid it and to loose something was to allow it. In early Jewish thought, to loose was to permit something, and to bind meant not to permit something...In Christ’s time, the Pharisees felt they were administrators of all public affairs and were empowered to banish and readmit as they pleased, as well as to loose and to bind...Christ demonstrated His spiritual authority over demons when He rebuked (bound) a demon from speaking (*Mark 1:25*), and when He loosed the tongue of a man with a ‘deaf and dumb’ spirit (*Mark 7:35-37*)...In this context, Christ is releasing spiritual authority to His followers over all the powers of Satan-to bind Satan’s power and to loose people from his power” (*Stone, 33*).

By understanding that Jesus has already released this power and authority to all who stand on the foundation that Jesus is, “the Messiah, the Son of the Living God” (*Matthew 16:16*), we define Jesus as the One with the power and authority over the very keys of the kingdom of heaven that were given to Peter, and all other believers to follow; that is, Christians. He gave the keys to Christians, and those keys are that Jesus is the Messiah. He is our Savior, and He was, is and always will be the Son of God, human and Divine.

What are Christians to do with these keys? Jesus tells us, through Matthew, which rightly reads, “whatever you bind on earth *will have been* bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth *will have been* loosed in heaven.” (*Matthew 16:19b*). Jesus says the same thing in the same way in *Matthew 18:18* and then explains in verses 19 & 20 that if two Christians on earth are in agreement about anything, it will be done for you by God because you are in agreement with Him, as Jesus is there in the midst of that agreement in His will. The distinction between *will be* and *will have been* is significant, because to say that whatever I bind, will be bound is to suggest that as *I* define my *own* will in a situation, God will act to perform what I have decreed.

This is an erroneous and dangerous definition that has caused confusion, disappointment and even distrust in God when people have attempted to bind something in their lives or the lives of others, and then did not see recognizable results. This perception has created a mistrust in God, as if His Words were not true, or were not for everyone, and has even led some to sadly believing that perhaps the reason they did not see results was because they simply were not Christian enough or beloved enough for God to answer when their call.

What God has shown me in this passage, through praying about the original text as it was written, is that whatever I loose on earth, *will have been* loosed in heaven, meaning that what was previously loosed in heaven, will be loosed by me, and other Christians on earth as we work, and speak and live within the will of God and the workings of His kingdom principles. This is evident by the fact that Peter did not come up with the notion of Jesus as Lord on his own. The Father revealed to Peter a truth that had already been loosed in heaven, that Jesus was here to fulfil God’s promise of salvation through a Messiah and that the Messiah was God in the flesh.

Peter was not declaring Jesus to be Messiah and the Son of God, thereby making it so in heaven. We do not move God, nor do we get to decide what God would or would not do, nor was Peter, “given authority to admit

people into God's kingdom or to choose what he wanted to allow and disallow. Rather, Jesus gave authority to Peter and the other apostles to correctly interpret God's message and to share it with others" (*Houdmann*), as are all Christians who agree with the Word and will of God. We, as Christians, have the honor of knowing, through a relationship with God, things that He wills, things that He has loosed and the things that He desires for us, which we may or may not declare and receive, in Jesus' name. Now that *is* Good News!

The Lord has already defined you, who you are in Christ, what He has planned for you, His will for your life, and plans to, "prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" *He says*, "Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

This is what has been loosed for you in heaven. Will you loose it on earth? Have you searched the Bible or asked God to show you what He has already bound that you may be still struggling with needlessly? Not even the gates of Hell can prevail against the things that God has decreed for you which you receive by faith, nor can any person, enemy or entity define you as something less than you are, which is a divinely, uniquely created child of the most High God, entitled to an inheritance of eternal life with your Loving Father in Heaven.

I ask you, sisters and brothers, will you not accept who Jesus is and all that God has designed for your life? For those who may be reading this that do not define themselves as Christians, will you refuse to believe the lies told to you and about you that try to tell you who you are, or what you are not, what you cannot do, or where you have failed?

Will you take on the true identity of a Christian by asking Christ to forgive and forget all you have done to harm yourself, or others, and those things that have not been true of who you really are and ask Jesus to live within you, and then hold fast in faith to the fact that by doing so, you now hold the promise that you will live eternally with Him in His kingdom? I pray you do, for I know that, "you are the head and not the tail" (*Deuteronomy 28:13*), and, "you have been made more than a conqueror through Christ, Jesus" (*Romans 8:37*), and you have been made for an amazing purpose (*Esther 4:14*), through Christ, Jesus. Amen.

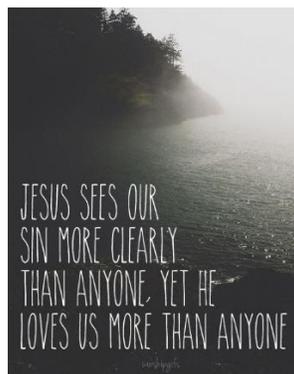
**Hymn:** *"I Have Decided To Follow Jesus"* #344 (Click on link) <https://youtu.be/S8jvfdDtoqY>

**Benediction:**

May you go forth with the sure and unwavering confidence that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, and that you, through Christ, have indeed inherited all that was purchased through His shed blood and sacrifice. May you go forth in the power and authority of His mighty Name, Amen.

*May the Lord bless and keep you all.*

**Closing Song:** *"Who You Say I Am"* by Hillsong Worship (Click on link) [https://youtu.be/IcC1Bp13n\\_4](https://youtu.be/IcC1Bp13n_4)



Works Cited

Bible verses in citations *New International Version* unless otherwise listed. \*Call to worship, Invocation, Pastoral prayer adapted from lectionary Stone, Perry. 2016. *The Perry Stone Hebraic Prophecy Study Bible*. © Perry Stone Ministries. Austin: Fedd Books  
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