**Symbols of Christ in Stained Glass: The Key of David September 29, 2013 Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Matthew 16:13-20 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**Jesus Holds the Keys**

**I. To death**

**II. To heaven**

*13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" 14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist;* *others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* *15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ,* *the Son of the living God."* *17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man,* *but by my Father in heaven.* *18 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.* *19 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."* *20 Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone* *that he was the Christ.*

When people visit our area of Kentucky for the first time, one of the most often requests is this: “Can we tour the fort and see the gold?” First of all, it’s an Army post. Secondly, if you want to see the gold you have to scale four fences, two of which are electrified. Then, work your way through the wide open field full of land mines. Then, blast your way through the four foot thick granite wall. If you get past the armed guards inside, you’ll have to work your way through a maze of corridors and stairways and then you’ll be stopped by the 22 ton vault door. But don’t worry! It can be opened. You just have to gather all of the employees of the US Mint who have their little piece of the combination, which, when put together will open the vault. Then you’ll be able to see the 5000 tons of gold stored there.

Keys and locks and combinations are for keeping unauthorized people out of secure areas and letting authorized individuals into secure areas. I think more than having all of the gold in Fort Knox the one treasure that most people on earth would want to have is heaven. The Bible talks about the gates to heaven. Wouldn’t it be nice to know the person who holds the keys?

In our First Lesson today, Isaiah 22:22, the prophet Isaiah prophesied that a man by the name of Eliakim would be administrator of the royal palace in Israel. He would hold the key to the treasuries of King David’s family – the vast amount of gold, silver and bronze the royal family had accumulated. But Isaiah’s prophecy had a greater fulfillment. A descendant from King David’s family would one day hold the keys to greater wealth.

In Revelation chapter 3, which we also heard this morning, Jesus says that he holds the Key of David. Jesus is the Key of David. He holds the keys to untold treasures. This morning we will learn that Jesus Holds the Keys: the key to death and the key to heaven.

**I. To death**

When you walk out of church today after Bible study, walk through the front doors, and immediately look to your right. In the brick you’ll see a little metal box called a Knox Box. In that box are two keys: the master key to our building and a key to the fire alarm panel. The only people that have access into that Knox box are the members of the fire department. In the event of a fire at our church the firefighters would open a special panel in their fire truck, and there would be a key for our Knox Box. They would then be able to access the building without breaking through our nice doors. This key keeps our building safe.

Jesus talked about protecting his Church, but he wasn’t talking about a church building. Christ’s Church is all people all over the world who believe in him as their Savior. In our lesson today he told his disciple Peter, **“…the gates of Hades will not overcome [my Church].”** Just as a contractor will add a new building warranty to his construction, Jesus adds a guarantee to his Church, but this warranty will never expire. “**The gates of Hades will not overwhelm it.”** Hades can be translated in different ways. It can be interpreted as death. Death is certainly destructive. It brings rot and decay to the Church, to God’s people. Hades can also be translated as hell. The fires of suffering certainly threaten God’s Church. Hades could also refer to all of the forces of evil. Satan certainly tries to break in and steal people away from God’s Church.

But good news for God’s Church is that Jesus is the Key of David. As the key, he keeps his building safe. In Revelation chapter 1, which we heard this morning, he said, **“I hold the key to death and Hades…”** He holds the key because he defeated death and Hades.

In medieval times, Richard “Lionheart” King of England and Philip II king of France, defeated the city of Acre, in northern Palestine. The leaders of the city handed the keys of the city to these kings. They earned the right to have authority and absolute power over the city.

In the same way the Key of David conquered the enemies of the Church. But he did it in an unusual way. He allowed himself to be defeated by the Church’s enemies. He suffered through the fires of hell on the cross. He allowed death’s chains to wrap tight around his body and take his life from him and drag him down to the grave. But by allowing himself to be defeated by all of the enemies of the Church he destroyed their power. Because he took your place and suffered as your substitute, removing the power of death and hell might have over you. And so before he rose again, he descended into hell. There he announced his victory over Satan, his victory over hell and our sins. Before he left hell he took with him the keys of death and Hades. Then He broke the chains of death and raise his body on Easter Sunday and lives today so that he holds the keys to death. He has absolute power over death and Hades.

But there are a lot people who don’t know this. They are afraid of death because they don’t know what happens after death, where will they go. But you know! There is no question. Jesus holds power over death. But you forget that truth sometimes, don’t you? Have you ever stopped to think, “You know, I’ve lived half of my life already.” Or maybe, “I’ve lived most of my life already. Death is not far off!” And then you think about how you will die. You see all of the violent crimes on the news and hear about fatal car accidents and disease and you wonder, “How will I die?” And there’s that little knot of fear in your stomach as you contemplate your mortality. Then you realize that you really have no control over death. Death is inevitable. It will happen. God said, “All have sinned. All will die. The consequence of sin is death.” And you realize that this is a bleak outlook on life.

The Greeks in Jesus’ day had a bleak outlook on death, too. According to their mythology the Greek god Hades was ruler of the Underworld. The souls of people who died were sent to the Underworld and couldn’t get out because Hades three headed dog Cerberus guarded the gates. Those souls wanted to escape. The Greek Underworld was neither heaven nor hell, but much worse than life on earth - a place where you passed your time, and eventually faded away into nothing. Some poor folks didn’t even make it to the Underworld. They were kind of stuck in this limbo place between earth and the Underworld.

For you, when you die, you know that your souls don’t go to some holding area. They don’t go to Hades. Jesus holds the key to hell. When you die your soul will depart from your body. Your soul will go to be with Jesus. There your spirit will live until Jesus decides to come to earth again. He will be holding in his hands the key of death. He will unlock your grave, your urn, and will release your body from death and decay. He will bring your body back together again, and your body will live again. He will reunite your soul with your body and you, with body and soul, will stand on the earth.

Because he holds the keys to hell and death, the Key of David says, “Do not be afraid! Do not fear as you ponder your life, your future - how you will die, when you will die - you know and believe that Jesus holds the keys.” He has released you from Hades already. He has released you from death’s grasp already. So you say with confidence, “I do not fear you, death! I do not fear you grave! For Jesus is the key to my life.” So there I will stand with you and all those who confess as Peter did, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Then what? Well… not only does Jesus hold the key to death and Hades, also holds the keys to the treasures of heaven…

**II. To heaven**

In a casual conversation with another parent at my kid’s school, I discovered that he works for the US Mint on Fort Knox. My first inclination was to bombard him with twenty questions, but then I restrained myself and thought, “You know, he wouldn’t be able to tell me anyway. So it’ll have to remain a secret.” But when we talk about the indescribable treasures and blessings of heaven, the streets paved with gold, the gates made from a single pearl, it is no secret. And it is not a secret how to get in. Jesus holds the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said, “**I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me**.” He is that key that unlocks the gates to heaven. For us and all who believe in him as Savior from sin and death and hell, he has already opened wide the doors to heaven for us.

Unlike a worker at the US Mint, Jesus is able to give those keys to others. The Key of David told Peter, **“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.”** These keys that Jesus gave to his Church, that is to all believers, are the keys to unlock, or loose, the gates to heaven and to lock, or bind, the gates to heaven, by announcing to someone, “Your sins are forgiven,” or “Your sins are not forgiven.” (John 20.23)

Pharisees asked this question of Jesus, a question that has been asked of me, “**Who can forgive sins but God alone?”** Yes, only God can forgive sins. However, Jesus in Matthew 18 commands us to point out the sins of a fellow believer and to announce to them that their sins are not forgiven when they are not sorry for their sins and continue to persist in their sin. By announcing that their sins are not forgiven, we are telling them that the door to heaven is closed. Why would we say something so unloving? In fact, it is the most loving thing we as Christians can do. Our hope and prayer is that they see the seriousness of their sin and repent and turns to Jesus for forgiveness. When that person repents you have the privilege to say to them, “You are forgiven! Because Jesus has paid the price for your sins. The door to heaven is open again! Rejoice!” What a blessing and a privilege you have. Jesus, the Key of David, has given you the keys of the kingdom to open those doors to untold treasures…

…the streets paved with gold, the River of Life running through the city, the Tree of Life with its fruit hanging for all to eat, the banquet table prepared by Jesus for us to eat and drink… and that’s just the beginning. We cannot even begin to imagine the treasures waiting for us there! But we do know who holds the key to that treasure - that is Jesus, the Key of David. He holds the key to death. He has released you from its chains already. He holds the key to heaven, and he has opened its gates already. “Oh come, O Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home. Make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery.” *(Christian Worship 23:4 Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel)* Amen!