

*13Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 17And 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. 18And 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. 19I 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.” 20Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.*

*Romans 12:1-8: I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.*

Twenty-nine - par was 36 but that evening we shot a twenty-nine - seven under par in nine holes of golf.

We had begun the round complaining that we had none of the big hitters on our team – none of the great putters – Out of the ten teams that played that evening we might have been ranked seventh or eighth. But something special happened that evening – each person on our team contributed.

We were playing in a scramble – each golfer hits a drive and then the next shot for each is hit from the spot where the best drive ended up. After each has hit a second shot again each hits from the spot where the best second shot ended up and so on. Now often in scrambles one team member dominates – and the rest it seems are just along for the ride. But that night Dwight who had polio as a child was hitting the best shot about one-fourth of the time - the same with Larry and Dennis and me. No stars on our team that evening but when all the scores were added up we were seven under par and better than all the rest. Each of us did our share.

“You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I 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.” Peter, the one given authority by Jesus, the one who on the day of Pentecost preached the sermon that led to three thousand choosing to be baptized - Peter, according to tradition, the first bishop of Rome.

This passage in the gospel according to Matthew is the scriptural basis for the papacy; the Pope, the bishop of Rome, is understood to be the successor of Peter. The authority Jesus gave to Peter is now claimed for the Pope, the authority to bind and loose – that is authority to declare what is permitted and what is forbidden – the keys to the kingdom of heaven are understood by the Roman church to be in the hands of the Pope.

But decades before the Gospel According to Matthew was written a man named Paul who had been called to ministry by Jesus himself wrote a letter to the church in Rome. In Paul’s writings there is a different vision for authority in the church. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to all the baptized. About the use of these gifts Paul writes the following: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many are one body in Christ and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher in teaching, the exhorter in exhortation; the giver in generosity; the leader in diligence; the compassionate in cheerfulness.”

Everyone is given a gift but no one is given all the gifts – for the health and vitality of the body of Christ each must use the gift that God has given. Paul’s vision is very different from the understanding that authority in the church is top-down authority. Top-down authority says that on top is God and then Jesus and then the bishop and then pastors and then the people. But Paul’s vision is of a body created by the Holy Spirit that is Christ’s own body. In this body leadership is one of the ways a baptized person may be gifted, compassion is also a gift, and giving, a gift. In what God has revealed through Paul there is no hierarchy in the body of Christ. Pastors are not closer to God than the one who sends cards to shut-ins. Each has been given gifts that are essential to the life of the body.

Martin Luther taught the priesthood of all believers. The authority of Christ is given to the church – all the baptized have been given authority to forgive sins by Jesus but for the sake of good order you call a pastor to exercise

this authority on your behalf. Others are called to ministry of teaching Sunday School and visiting the sick and ushering in worship and serving meals in the Family Promise program.

I began this sermon speaking of my golf experience because I think that especially at this time it will be important for you to each use the gifts that you have been given by the Holy Spirit. Had the other members of my team waited for me to make the great shots that evening we would not have done well. But each contributed and a wonderful thing happened.

The vitality of this congregation will be obvious if each of you shares with the whole church the gift that the Holy Spirit has given to you. The tendency here has been to look to some to carry more than they should while others sit on the sidelines and watch. In the time of transition that is beginning it is time to hear and heed Paul's words: "Having gifts that differ, let us use them." This will not be a time to sit on the sidelines and wait but a time to be all that God has gifted you to be. Amen.

