

Nestled where Lake Huron meets Lake Michigan, right in the middle of the Straits of Mackinac lies my favorite place in the entire world: Mackinac Island. To me, it is a place of wonder, home to the wafting smell of fudge, the clip clop of horses and the distinct absence of car engines, surrounded by the clear blue waters of the Great Lakes. If you have seen the classic film *Somewhere in Time* with Jane Seymour and Christopher Reeve, you have seen Mackinac, filmed there on the grounds of the Grand Hotel. It is that picture perfect, cinema worthy. If you were to ask me what heaven looked like, I would probably say, it's Mackinac.

Now, while there are many iconic sites on the Island, there is one that always leaves me breathless and gives me a sense of peace. If you head east around the Island, about a mile or so from town you will come upon a makeshift, wooden staircase that will lead you up into the hills, and there hewn into the side of the island is Arch Rock. It is exactly what it sounds like, a massive swell of rock that over the course of millennia has been eroded by wind, waves, and glacial movement to form an arch. It stands 146 feet above Lake Huron and from the top you can see straight through that arch out across the water. It is a masterpiece of nature, but the sad reality is that it has a time limit on it.

The inherent problem with having a landmark that has been created by erosion is that erosion doesn't stop. The wind doesn't just bypass Arch Rock know that it's perfectly formed, snow doesn't stop falling on it and melting into it forming ice that gets into its cracks and crevices. The park service has done its best to reinforce it with meshing and other feats of engineering but there is a reality that is known to Mackinac lovers, our beloved Arch has an expiration date. It may have to be moved to be preserved, which will keep its integrity but completely change the terrain of the Island or it may be left to the winds and waves of time and eventually the arch will collapse and have to be rebuilt, still there, but not the same.

We have a tendency to think of rocks as the most solid, the most sure of formations, untouchable, unable to be cracked or broken down, and yet everyday the world around us shows us that that is not the case. Rocks are just as susceptible as we are to slings and arrows of change, the impacts of the world, and where they are in it. Yet, rocks are well...rocks and so they don't really get a choice about how they adapt, change, and move with the ebb and flow of time, they let it happen and see where the world takes them, and sometimes the world forms them into beautiful wonders and sometimes the world wears them away into something entirely new. Rocks are forced

to adapt to their circumstances...and maybe Jesus recognized that when he gave Peter this new name, the rock on which he will build his church.

We've jumped a little bit ahead in Matthew's narrative this week and there has been a lot going on, another miraculous feeding, tons of healings, and continued warnings about the type of vibes the Pharisees and Sadducees put out into the world. We're also at a vital turning point—almost to the Transfiguration, which means it's almost time to turn towards Jerusalem and for Jesus to enter into the end game of his ministry. Before all of that happens though, Jesus wants to do a temperature check; if he wants the rest of the world to believe he is the Messiah, he needs to see if he's gotten that message through to his inner circle first, because if he hasn't, well then this is going to be a harder mountain to climb.

He starts with the simpler question, they're the ones around the crowds, what are they hearing about who people think Jesus is? He gets a smattering of answers, John the Baptist, back from the dead—an interesting nod to resurrection, Elijah, Jeremiah, at the very least a prophet. Jesus takes these answers in and then ups the ante, ok but who do *you*, my guys, my friends, my people say that I am. Peter, loud, boisterous, sometimes foot in mouth Peter doesn't even hesitate, you are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Peter's confession is a bold declaration that Jesus is who they

have been waiting for, that God is alive and active in the world, and that Jesus has been sent to the world to redeem it. We're not going to jump ahead to how Peter manages to mess this up, that'll come next week, for now we're going to sit in the bravery of this moment.

Jesus responds instantly. He looks at Peter and sees the future, this is the guy, he's the one, the one that will be the foundation. Jesus knows Peter isn't perfect, has watched him mess up countless numbers of times, but he also knows his heart, his faith, the ardent belief that he holds which has allowed him to make this confession. Jesus tells Peter that how Jesus is perceived in the world will be up to him, how they forgive people, how they manage what is and is not prohibited, they will be the ones putting out into the world what they have learned from Jesus, whether they choose to stick to what they have learned or change it, it's going to be up to them, up to Peter to be Jesus' hands and feet in the world when Jesus is gone.

In 2,000 plus years, that reality hasn't changed. The church still exists, built on the foundation that Peter and the disciples began, but I think we have failed to remember some of the vital lessons that we learned in earth science when it comes to rocks and reality, lessons that the people and tourists of Mackinac are learning every season as they watch Arch Rock change, erode, alter as it gets battered by the waves. The vital lesson is just

that...rocks change, they erode, they grow smooth, they have to be shifted in order to keep standing sometimes, they have to adapt to the new shape that they have been given by the world. We are a church built on a rock, but we are extremely adamant that that rock is immune to the realities of its rockiness. We believe our rock is stalwart, never changing, the same shape it has always been, putting blinders on to avoid seeing the reality before us. It would be like geologists looking at Arch Rock and going oh I'm sure that's fine, it's stood for this long, rather than trying to shore up its foundations, help it adapt and adjust, think through what happens if it has to move. Suddenly our church rockiness doesn't sound so pleasant.

When Jesus says that Peter is the rock on which he will build his church, I think it's a two fold declaration. On the one hand, Peter's confession is *the rock* upon which the church will be built. No matter what, no matter the slings and arrows of the ages, one thing will always and forever hold true, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. That is the part of our rockiness that is unchanging, sure and solid and always there. On the other hand, Peter himself is also that rock, and humans are nothing if not changeable, we adapt with the times, we flounder on occasion, we erode, we shift, we live in a world that will alter us even if we don't ask it to. That is the part of the earth science lesson we forget. We think being built

on a rock means that we can never change, that we must always be what we have always been, but that's not what Jesus meant. Jesus meant that who we are at our core, God's children, and what we believe, that Jesus is the Messiah is never going to change, but upon *that* solid foundation, we are going to have to shift and move because we were built by humans who are nothing if not fallible.

The world around us has changed, church—as we have defined it in the past—is no longer what everyone wants, but that doesn't mean that there isn't a hunger in the world for what we have to offer, love, grace, acceptance, a safe space, a belief in justice and equity according to God's definitions not the world's. However, we get so stuck in our sense of rockiness that we think we are immovable, we can't change, we must be the bastion of who we were 2,000 years ago and if people don't want what we have well then that's their problem, not our problem. Jesus knew the church was going to have to adapt, that's why he handed it over to humans. But we have gotten so mired in who we think we must always be that we have lost our sense of calling in the world, stuck letting the wind and rain and ice assail us and just saying well we were put here so I guess we have to crumble here, as opposed to being creative and adapting with the prevailing

winds around us and changing into something new and just as beautiful and just as necessary.

At the end of the day, what Jesus handed over to Peter and all the disciples was the gift of being him in the world, they would be God's hands, feet, voice, God's very being in the world. It would be up to them to define what it means to be followers of the Son of the Living God, and we forget that. We forget that we are the ones that show this world who God is, and if we show that God is unforgiving, judgmental, and unaccepting, well yeah, our rock is going to crumble beneath us. But we live in a world that is rife with opportunity to do just the opposite, to say we believe in a God that is full of grace and hope and love and acceptance and we are that God's people so come build on our rock, it changes every now and then, but Jesus never changes and that's the most important thing.

The church has a choice before it, just as the geologists who are in charge of Arch Rock's preservation do. Do we refuse to adapt and say, this is where we were planted and so when we crumble we crumble? Or do we get creative? Build some new girders, imagine an internal system that holds us a little tighter, even imagine existing differently than we ever have? Christ is our foundation, just as the rocks of Mackinac are to Arch Rock, but the questions remains to us...how will we grow on that foundation? **AMEN!**