

Isaiah 51:1-6
Romans 11:33-12:8
Matthew 16:13-20

Here's mud in your eye. It's a friendly drinking toast, a brief quip before friends imbibe a beverage designed to make glad the heart of man (Psalm 104:15). Here's mud in your eye. It's a curious phrase. The etymology of the toast is a bit cloudy. Here are a few possibilities. Perhaps it originated in WWI. Soldiers lived in muddy trenches in WWI. "Here's mud in your eye" may have been a dark joke referencing death, alleviating their suffering by making light of death before they had a drink. Or maybe it's a horse-racing reference. The victorious jockey, whose silks remain relatively clean, is toasting his victory by snarkily referencing the mud kicked up by his horse into the eyes of those who trailed him round the rails.

Here's mud in your eye. Years ago, I was a contestant on a game show called Wipeout. It's an obstacle course gauntlet where the fun comes from seeing people get walloped by the dangers lurking on the course. The first serious challenge, at least for me, was the "Lawn Mower" which had rotating bars that were designed to mow down the contestant and drop them into a pool of mud. I was chopped down. Head to toe, mud. I popped up after being submerged in the goo, opened my eyes, and all I saw was brown. Mud was definitely in my eye. The production people on the side could have been Redcoats or little green men or dressed as clowns or not dressed at all, I wouldn't have known. Here's mud in your eye. The origin I like best is that Jesus healed a blind man by spitting on dirt, making mud, putting the mud on the man's eyes, and telling the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man came back seeing. The end of this episode, which takes a whole chapter in the Gospel According to John, has the man recognizing who Jesus is, believing, and worshipping the Son of Man (John 9).

In today's reading, Jesus is in teaching mode, leading His disciples down a path of discovery. "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13). Remember, Jesus doesn't ask the question because He needs information. It's a "word on the street" kind of question. What's Entertainment Tonight saying about Me? What's the church down the street saying about Me? The disciples seem to have their ear to the ground. They are conversant with the gossip spreading around town. "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:14). Clearly, Jesus is a powerful figure, but the crowds are off on their ability to identify the Lord. The crowds have mud in their eyes. Jesus hones in. "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15).

Do you think that you have that question pegged? How much mud is in your eye? The religious rulers told Pontius Pilate that Jesus deserved to be crucified because He claimed to be the Son of God. "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God" (John 9:7). How ironic is that? Their law, their mud in their eyes, led Jesus to be crucified which resulted in humanity's redemption – isn't that exactly why the Son of God was made man? Jesus' cross is the authenticating proof that He is who He says He is. Mud in their eyes was the instrument God used to bring clarity to the world. Who do you say that I am? Do you have that question pegged?

Simon isn't waiting for someone else. Light had broken in on Simon's heart, Simon's mind and he wasn't waiting for someone else. Simon wasn't politely deferential, he wasn't careful not to step on anyone's toes, he wasn't reading the room to see where the consensus might be. Boldly, Simon confessed. Simon didn't hedge, but confessed: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:16). Did Simon's heart race as he gave voice to eternal truth? I don't know. Was there joy in Simon's heart as the words tumbled out of his mouth? I don't know. Did Simon's eyes widen as he captured the astounding reality that stood before him? I don't know. What I do know is conviction. What I do know is the power of revelation. What I do know is clarity of sight. You are the Christ! You are the Son of the Living God! Simon didn't bring *himself* to that place; Simon was brought. Simon is not praised for his great insight. Simon is pronounced blessed because God the Father has revealed the Son to him. "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:17-18).

Conviction; are you familiar with certainty? "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1 NIV). "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1 ESV). I remember my beloved esposa providing for me a theological argument 40 years ago that has resonated with me ever since. She told me: "God said it, I believe it, end of story." Conviction oozed from every syllable. Have you had mud removed from your eyes, you begin to see clearly, and confessing the truth about Christ – who He is, what He has done, what He is doing now – is easy, fresh, and natural? Do Lutherans sometimes defer to other Christians who have mud in their eyes? It's one thing to be a jerkface know-it-all. It's another thing to be a theological wallflower. Conviction! Jesus said this: "nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops" (Matthew 10:27). It takes conviction. St. Paul wrote this: "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Anything other than that is mud in your eye.

We have God's Word! We have the astounding revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have an infallible, inerrant Word that is able to make us wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). We are not ashamed of the gospel, for it the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... for in it the righteousness of God is revealed... the righteous shall live by faith (Romans 1:16-17). The gates of hell shall not prevail against this Word of truth. It's living and active, this holy Word, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). It penetrates to the deepest places. Gates are a defensive structure. Hell's gates can't stand against us. The church is on the offense, taking a battering ram to the gates of darkness, the gates of the demonic. We don't pelt the gates of hell with opinion or conjecture or drippy sentimentality. We lift high the cross of Christ. We confess His name with joy and clarity and conviction.

The Son of God was incarnated by the Holy Spirit and took up our poor flesh and bone (Luke 1:35). True God and true man, in one person, the Son of Mary lived a perfectly holy life, loving God above all things and loving His neighbor as Himself (Romans 10:4). Jesus of Nazareth is the perfect revelation of the Father (Colossians 1:15). He set His face toward Jerusalem and offered Himself there as a sacrifice (Luke 9:51; John 10:18). Jesus Christ – He is the perfect

embodiment of the Priesthood, the Temple, the Sacrificial system (Hebrews 10:1). The OT pointed toward Him and the Son of God fulfilled it entirely (Galatians 3:24). He suffered for our sins (Isaiah 53:5). The Lord Christ was crucified for our sins (1 Peter 3:18). His love defines His death (Romans 5:8). His grace defines His death (Luke 23:34). His triumph defines His death (Colossians 2:15). Forgiveness, life, and salvation streamed from His holy body. You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God! His church is built on this confession. Christ's church is strong, bold, faithful and true. We shall live and not die (Psalm 118:17). Death cannot have us for Christ is risen (1 Corinthians 15:55). Love animates Christ church. You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. You give us your body to eat and your blood to drink (Matthew 26:26-28). Your Word says it, we believe it. You washed us in your blood in Holy Baptism, and we are cleansed, made new, alive with your resurrection (Ephesians 5:25-27). Baptism now saves us (1 Peter 3:21). Your Word says it, we believe it. God's Word is alive. Our faith is alive. Easter has done its work and we are blessed. I can see clearly now, the mud is gone. Blessed are you, the saints of Christ the King, for your faith is the product of God's Word, a sure and certain revelation (Romans 10:17; 2 Peter 1:19). Trust it! Believe it! Live it! Confess it!