

In the name of Jesus; Amen.

There are probably many parts of Scripture that Peter wished didn't exist. Hey Peter, remember that time you tried to walk on the water to Jesus, but were more scared of the wind and waves? What about when you told Jesus not to wash even your feet, then asked for Him to wash all of you 10 seconds later? Remember how Paul called you out in front of a bunch of Christians for being a hypocrite? Or that time you denied Jesus three times? Or how John outran you to Jesus' tomb because you were slow? Or for suggesting to make tents for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus during the Transfiguration? Peter, do you remember the good old times when Jesus used to call you Satan?

If the Word of God did not record all these less than stellar moments of St. Peter, I am sure that Peter may have tried to deny that they happened. He may have pretended to forget he said any of this. He may have tried to seem offended that the other disciples misinterpreted him so badly. He may have attempted to argue that he actually didn't mean any of what he said. But he knew. The mouth reveals the heart. Peter was bold, but he was often immature and thought he knew more than he actually did. Good thing for Peter, that is not all he is remembered for. Today we remember the bold confession he made of Christ. He is the first disciple of our Lord to confess Jesus' identity. "You are the Christ" and Matthew adds "The Son of the living God." We have an epiphany on our hands.

I guessed how Peter might have approached his embarrassing words and stories because we are like him, and he like us. What is in our heart always comes out on the tip of our tongues. Our mouths reveal our hearts. How often have you pretended not to mean what you said, when you absolutely did? Haven't you acted shocked and hurt when your words were misinterpreted, even though you weren't and others heard exactly what you meant? Don't you pretend to forget some hurtful or immature words you have spoken, when you shamefully can remember them all? Yes, what we say reveals who we are. We make confessions like Peter all the time. Sinful, petty, stupid, angry, nasty confessions. It is what comes out of the heart that defiles a man. And we have sinful hearts. Repent. We have hearts that need to be created new. We speak sinful human words that need to be drowned out and forgiven by the Word of God.

Jesus tells His disciples to tell no one about Peter's confession. He tells them to stop up their mouths, to not make confession. The reason why is because they did not understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ. So Jesus tells them right away. He must suffer, be rejected, killed, and after three days rise again. That is what it means to be the Christ. Jesus made the true confession regarding Himself. Peter tried to take Him aside and rebuke Him. But when Jesus turned around, He saw His disciples. He saw His sheep. And the wolf, Satan himself, was seeking to harm them through the mouth of Peter, the very mouth that had uttered such a great confession earlier. Jesus tells the serpent to eat dust.

When Jesus preaches to us in the Word, that He is true God and true man, that He would have us uphold marriage and family, value His Word highly, pray daily, gather with our fellow Christians often; when He speaks the Word of forgiveness to sinners openly, convicting guilty consciences and consoling with His cleansing; when He tells us to deny ourselves, and stop thinking we are the center of the universe, to put others before us; or take up our cross which kills our sinful desires; or follow Him though we like to believe we are the masters of our lives; we might be tempted to take Jesus aside and rebuke Him as Peter did. Many may say that they want the real Jesus to stand up. But what he preaches and how He lives may seem so contrary to what we think Jesus should be, that it be better if he just blended in with the rest of the world. It would be better to remind Jesus that He would be much more accepted as a great man, than as God from God in our human flesh. If Jesus would be less strange or backwards or against the sinful world, then we, as Christians, wouldn't have to stick out so much either. If we lower the standards for Jesus, maybe we could blend in more. He could look more like us, and we would look less like Him.

Jesus doesn't want a lukewarm confession. He doesn't want a faithless confession. He doesn't want a comfortable or nostalgic confession. He doesn't seek for praise when things are going well. Jesus asks the disciples who people say He is. They answer that some think He is John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. That answer hasn't changed too much today. People are comfortable with saying that Jesus is a nice person, a revolutionary figure, a mighty prophet, a good moral example. These are all poor confessions.

People can't say more about Jesus, because they are but flesh and blood, pulled around by the nose in their ring by what they think to be reason and wisdom and sensitivity. People cannot say that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God unless the Father reveals this to them in the

Spirit. To say that Jesus is the Son of the living God is to do far more than speak a few words. It is to recognize that God has a claim on you, body and soul. To call Jesus anything else than the Son of God is easy enough. It doesn't demand any commitment from you. But to confess with the mouth and believe in the heart that Jesus is Lord changes everything. He frees you from sin and the devil to be His own. He forgives your sin, to be in relationship with Him. He redeems you to be in communion with God. He conquers death so that you might live in Him. To confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God is a life and death commitment.

That is the most important question you will ever be asked: Who do you say that Jesus is? He is not your heavenly cheerleader, He is not your date, He is not your best friend. He is not a great man among many others. He is the Son of the living God. He comes to bring life to you, by giving up His own. If Jesus was anything but the Son of the living God, He would not be worth living or dying for. He would not be worth denying yourself, carrying your cross, and following Him. But because He is the Son of the living God, that confession cannot be changed or shortchanged or modified. It must be clearly confessed in life and in death. This is the only name under heaven by which we may be saved. So confess and live like it matters that you know Christ to be the Son of the living God. Here is the message so strong that the fires of hell cannot overcome it, and neither can our worries and troubles ever empty that statement of its truth. Here is the Son who brings us life by living in our place, who brings us life by dying in our place, who brings us life by rising from the dead to clothe us with His immortal life and make us partakers of the divine nature. This is what guarantees that there will always be a Christian church in the world, and what a profound blessing we participate in that here in West Allis/Milwaukee.

Christ is the Son of the living God, come to a world wracked with sin and death, and here to bring forgiveness and refreshment. So if the devil tries to rob your joy in Christ, remind Him that you know the Son of the living God. If the world tries to tempt you to forget Jesus, to find comfort and happiness in anything but God, confess that you know the Son of the living God. When your own doubt and sin and stressors and pain grind away and crush you, confess that you know the Son of the living God and He is here to strengthen and forgive. In this life, you will have trials. Children to raise, parents to care for, friends to pray about, spouses who hurt, pain and loneliness, discontent and frustration, job stress and insecurity, injuries, finances, churches with their own share of sinful conflict. But you know the Son of the living God. Our troubles ought not change our confession that He is our Savior, that He is what we need. They need not

diminish the reality that the victory is ours and so is the healing salve. He is Lord of this life and the one to come.

In the account of Peter's confession from St. Matthew, Jesus says in response, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Jesus will not build on the person of Peter. We heard how the gates of Hades did prevail against Peter, when he tried to correct Jesus and Jesus clearly rebukes him as Satan. Many Lutherans will argue that the rock upon which Jesus builds the church is what Peter said, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That is true, but not the whole thing. Jesus will build His church on the confession of St. Peter. It is in what we confess as a church and as faithful Christians that the church is built. The rock on which the church is built is not simply a truth claim written on a page. It is the very act of confessing with your mouth what you believe in your heart, that Jesus Christ is Lord, this is how the church is built. The church is built on the rock of confessing, of speaking who God is and what He does for us. God first spoke and confessed to us. God revealed to Peter this blessed reality that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And as you confess that with your mouth and actions, the church continues to be built. As you do not rebuke or try to change Jesus, but confess Him as He has revealed Himself to be in Scripture, you build up the church and the gates of hell cannot stand against it. If you want the church to grow, to be built up, confess Christ as Peter did, to those who like or like it not.

Peter had plenty of opportunity to confess Christ rightly. When he starts to sink in the water, he calls out to Jesus to save him. After he denies Jesus three times, Jesus tells him to strengthen the brothers. In the reading from Acts today, Peter is boldly confessing Christ to the council of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, the very same group that Jesus was sentenced to death by just a short time before. There are many examples in the rest of the New Testament in which Peter gets to make the good confession. In fact, according to church history, Peter died confessing Christ. The Roman Emperor Nero, it is said, wanted to find Peter and put him to death when he was in Rome. Fellow Christians convinced Peter to flee the city. But when Peter approached the gate to leave the city, he saw Jesus coming to meet him. Peter, reportedly, fell down and worshiped Him asking, "Lord, to where do you go?" Jesus replied, "I come again to be crucified." With this interaction, Peter was convinced that his own death would be by crucifixion. Yet, Peter, an old man, insisted that he be crucified upside down, since he was

unworthy to be crucified in the same way as his Lord. And so he died, sharing in the confession and suffering of Christ, counted worthy to shed his blood in martyrdom and water the church.

“Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

As Jesus’ disciple, these are your marching orders, your Christian reality. May you so too confess the name of Christ, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. The church is built of living stones that cry out and confess the cornerstone who is Christ. And when we have confessed, would that the world would look upon us as they did upon Peter and John: “And they realized they had been with Jesus.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; Amen.