

“Your Solid Confession”

Matthew 16:13-20

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Imagine a group walks into a courtroom. There's a judge there on the bench prepared to ask them all two simple questions: Who do others say that I am, and who do you say that I am? You might see numerous puzzled faces around that room, wondering what the right answer is that he wants them to say. And no, there is no pleading the Fifth to get them out of answering his questions. Answering the first question, multiple people say that he is a fair judge, learned in the law, and someone who deserves to sit on a higher court. But they all avoid the second question, and finally, one from among the group steps forward and speaks the truth—he is the judge in this courtroom, and he holds the power to condemn or justify every person in the room. The disciples face a similar conundrum as they gather with Jesus outside of the pagan temple in Caesarea Philippi. They stand there and answer their teacher's question of who others say that He is, responding with names of great prophets that would seem like flattery to any Jewish teacher.

But when He asks them who *they* say that He is, all but one remain silent. Peter steps forward and speaks on behalf of the whole group, proclaiming Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. There is the truth of who Jesus is, what He will do, and why He has come into the world all wrapped up into one solid confession. And upon that confession the Lord will lay the foundation for His Church. It is that truth which you confess every day in living out your justification by faith. It is that truth which you confess with your mouth in the words of the Creeds, as we just did a moment ago. The solid confession of the Church is not just some ambiguous idea that you come here and gather around. The foundation upon which it is built is not just its confession, but it is also your solid confession. You lay hold of that truth in faith, and just as the Lord tells Peter, blessed are you! It is not your flesh and blood that have revealed it to you, but your Father who is in heaven who has opened your mind to the truth of who He is.

Contemporary preachers and their neo-evangelical megachurches take our text this morning and turn it into a lesson for how you should live your life. Who do you say that Jesus is for you? They take your solid confession and turn it into a good luck charm, a spiritual rabbit's foot that you should carry around with you everywhere you go. That false doctrine from those false teachers isn't going to actually do anything for you. Talking about Jesus in terms of what He means to you, instead of what you mean to Him is the absolute opposite of the point that Jesus makes to Peter following his confession

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that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. The Lord tells Peter that “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” The knowledge of Christ is a gift from our loving God, one that has been given to us for the sake of the one who is the object of your faith.

Because your flesh and blood in its sinful condition could never reach that conclusion. It is corrupted by the sin of Adam that all mankind bears, even the disciples in our text. Making it all about “who Jesus is to you” is not the purpose of your confession of faith. It is simply about who Jesus is, and who He is to you is no different than it is for any other person in the world. Your sinful flesh doesn’t want to let that truth stand alone, though. It needs it to be all about you so that your desires are fulfilled and it keeps its hold on you. Confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9) is something you can’t do on your own. To make such a statement is contrary to your sinful nature, and without the renewal of your inner being in Baptism you would have no ability to turn to the Lord.

There is no hope that exists for you if you must stand on your own ability to make your confession of faith. You cannot have faith unless it is given to you by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and so you cannot confess that faith without the Spirit working in and through you to speak it. Peter only answered Jesus in the way he did because of the revelation of the Spirit. Scripture points clearly to the truth of the Messiah and what He will do, and the knowledge of that Word is known to the disciples. That base knowledge is God’s self-revelation by His Holy Word, and the connection to Jesus as the Christ can only be made by faith—faith that reveals everything that is spoken of in Scripture as pointing to Jesus as the source of salvation. You lay hold of that salvation by faith only because Jesus has done all the work for you. If you have to work harder and confess with more fervor in order to receive salvation, you’ll never reach that destination. You would be left out in the cold as one who always has more work to do.

Flesh and blood seek to pull you away from the salvation that has been won for you, but faith keeps you rooted in place by Christ’s work and not your own. Jesus has gone to the cross of Calvary to redeem the world, and that means every person of all times and places. He is the all-atoning sacrifice that has paid the price for sin through His innocent and precious blood. The spotless Lamb of God went willingly to His death so that you wouldn’t have to work your way to the knowledge of who He is. He took the punishment you deserve, and then imputed His righteousness to you to give you the knowledge and assurance of your salvation in Him. His redemptive work has made your inability to accomplish that in your sinful flesh completely irrelevant. Otherwise, you would be like those Paul describes in 2 Timothy 3:7, “always learning and never able to

arrive at a knowledge of the truth.” Cling to the revelation of Christ which has been given to you by your Father in heaven, for it is in His revelation that you come to the knowledge of the truth, not in your ability to figure it out.

When you confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, like Peter in our text you didn’t figure it out because of your great sleuthing ability. You confess Him because you belong to Him—because He has claimed you as His own dear child, not because you have “accepted” Him in your life. In the water of your Baptism, He made that choice to adopt you as His son, to give you the inheritance of perfection in His holy presence. No one earns that or deserves it, and yet, by the work of simple water connected to His Word of salvation, He does it for you anyway. He does it because of His great love for you. He does it because of the love He has for His only begotten Son, who went to the cross to show how much He loves you and wants you in His flock. By taking His righteousness and giving it to you in the water in which He claimed you, you were blessed with the gift of the faith which you now confess, “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:18).”

The hope of every believer lies in the promise of salvation by His blood shed for you. Your solid confession is never more certain than when you get to see that truth every time you come to the Lord’s table to receive His Supper. The Sacrament of the Altar bears witness to the truth that Christ died for the sins of the world, shedding His blood at the cross and giving up His spirit to defeat sin, death, and the devil. And in yet another great act of love, He gives you His very body and blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of your sins. As you partake of this bread and this cup, you are tasting and seeing that the Lord is good. Only through the revelation of His Word can this be understood, and only through faith can it be grasped. It IS His body, and it IS His blood, really and truly present here for you. It is through His Word and Sacraments that He continues to build His Church. It is only through the work of Jesus that the foundation was laid upon which His bride, the Church will always stand.

The joy of every believer is to know that is enough—that there is nothing for you to do because it is His love for you that holds you in the confession of who He is. By His continual outpouring of grace through His instituted means, He reveals all to you, and the constant truth for every believer is what is revealed to you by your Father in heaven. There is no greater joy than to know that you will have the gift of salvation and that you have the opportunity every day to confess that truth in Christ. You are a child of God, one whom He has chosen before the foundation of the world and has written your name in His Book of Life. The knowledge of Christ, who He is, and what He has done for you

will continually sustain you in this life. No matter the trials and tribulations which all of you will deal with as you walk with the Lord, Jesus is always constant. He never changes and what He has done for you will always be enough.

Your solid confession is grounded in that reality, and your solid confession is this: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, who loves you and gave Himself up for you. He gives you all good things, not because of your confession, but because you are His adopted son. You are His beloved child, and it is for the sake of Jesus that He has given you the blessing of everlasting life in His heavenly home. The promise of what is to come is the hope and joy of each and every one of you. You look with longing eyes to heaven, knowing that you will one day experience true joy and peace in the light of His glory. As you continue to walk in this life, confess what has been made known to you by faith, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, “for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face (1 Cor 13:12).” The fullness of that confession will be realized in His glorious presence when you stand before the throne of God singing “to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever (Rev. 5:13).” Amen.