

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 10, 2017

Matthew 16:13-20 (EHV) – ¹³When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴They said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵He said to them, “But you, who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰Then he commanded the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Introduction

“A man dies and meets St. Peter at the pearly gates...” How many times haven’t you heard a joke begin with those words? Personally, I’m confident that when I get there, I’m going to be right next to Jesus, and there won’t be any need for someone to check my pass at the door. But why do people have the idea that Peter’s the one standing at the gates in the first place? Obviously they think it’s because he’s got the keys to let people inside.

The words of our Gospel lesson are one of the bases for countless “pearly gates” jokes, but it’s actually a false basis. The keys spoken of in our text aren’t real keys on a ring hanging from a chain around Simon Peter’s neck. I highly doubt that Simon Peter’s job in heaven is that of a bouncer, standing around waiting for people to die so he can either send them away or show them to their rooms. For that matter, the keys themselves weren’t given to Peter alone. And the keys aren’t even the central focus in our text.

Theme: Clearly Confess the Christ!

The central theme before us today, is the confession that Peter made as the self-appointed spokesman for the disciples as a whole. We want to consider his words this morning and make them our own. As you go home today, take along with you a renewed zeal to **CLEARLY CONFESS THE CHRIST**. Let’s equip ourselves to do that by reviewing **the content of our confession, the source of our confession, and the result of our confession**.

Part I: The content of our confession.

If someone asked you who you were, the first thing you’d probably tell them is your name. Okay – but your name doesn’t really tell them very much about who you are. My driver’s license can tell people that much. Mike Gehl – 5’7” – 190 pounds – brown hair – brown eyes – needs corrective lenses – and so on. But does that really tell people who I am? It doesn’t tell people that I’m a Packer fan and that I enjoy playing golf and hiking and reading and that my personality tends to be a little more reserved. It doesn’t tell people that I love singing solid Lutheran hymns – even ones written in the 20th and 21st centuries – and that my music collection consists mostly of 80s rock ‘n’ roll. If you were to define who you are, you’d probably go a lot further than simply stating your name.

The content of our confession about Jesus is much more than his name, although his name packs a whole lot more meaning than any other name. The content of our confession is, as Peter so simply and eloquently stated, that Jesus is **“the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** Let’s break that statement down and see what we’re actually confessing when we say that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

“Christ” is more of a description than a proper name. That’s why in our text, it says *the* Christ. Our confession of Jesus as the Christ is saying without reservation that Jesus is the Anointed One – the promised Messiah of the Old Testament.

There were three classes of people who had oil poured over their heads to signify their installation into office. When the priesthood was first instituted, God had Moses put together a special mixture of oil and spices to anoint Aaron as the first high priest and then do the same for all subsequent priests. Saul, the very first king of Israel, was anointed by Samuel, who later anointed David to replace him. When Elijah's ministry as prophet was drawing to a close, God told him to anoint Elisha as his successor. Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed, and, as the Christ, Jesus was all three.

The job of a prophet was to tell people about God's plan of salvation and how he'd carry it out by sending his Son. Jesus served as prophet by pointing people to himself as the Savior and the fulfillment of God's plan. The job of a high priest was to offer sacrifices and to pray on behalf of the people. Jesus served as the great High Priest by offering himself as the once-for-all sacrifice and by carrying our prayers to his Father. The job of a king was to rule the people and to protect and provide for them. Jesus serves as king by ruling in the hearts of his people, by protecting them from the attacks of the devil, and by feeding and watering them with the banquet of his Word.

Clearly confessing the Christ means that we present him as the *only* revelation of God, the *only* means by which we satisfy God's righteous demands, the *only* means by which we approach God's throne of grace, and the *only* ruler of our lives. Our confession of Christ means that we reject every anti-biblical teaching, reject any alternate way of earning God's favor, reject any intercessor other than Jesus, and reject any attempt of anyone or anything else to control us.

Peter's confession didn't end there. He also said that Jesus was none other than **"the Son of the living God."** Take a poll and ask who people think Jesus is. A very low percentage will have anything bad to say about him. Even most of the people at Jesus' time held him in high regard. They thought he was a great prophet and teacher – John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah. Different era, same concept. You'll find that an unbelievably large number of people in the non-Christian world view Jesus as a great teacher – maybe even one of the greatest. All of those confessions, however, fall far short. Jesus is in a class of his own – he's the Son of God in the flesh! He's the Son of the living God. All other gods of the world are lifeless and non-existent. God is a living being and he's the giver of life.

Transition

That's the content of our confession. And there's only one reason why we're able to make that confession. In our text, Jesus tells us where we find its source.

Part II: The source of our confession.

The Bible says that **"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him— but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit."** It also says that **"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."** That backs up what Jesus says in our text (as if Jesus' words need backing up). **"Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'"**

There's a little something inside every single person that says that you're able to do something to catch God's eye or earn his love. On the other hand, the concept that God's reward of forgiveness and heaven is an absolutely free gift and that there's absolutely nothing in us that assists in any way, is completely foreign – and even foolish. Not one single person, in his wildest dreams, would or could come up with the Bible's teaching that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The source of our confession, then, is external – outside of ourselves. The source, according to Jesus, is his heavenly Father, who sent his Holy Spirit to teach us this wonderful truth. Through the tool of the gospel, we’ve come to the understanding – i.e. faith – that Jesus is the Christ. This same faith leads us to confess Christ. Peter and John said they couldn’t help but confess because the Holy Spirit made his home in their hearts. Not only is salvation a free gift, so is the trust in that salvation.

Transition

What we say will guide the way we live out our lives. By clearly confessing Jesus as the Christ, we’ve taken a stand and our conduct will follow accordingly. Let’s finish up this morning by looking at the results of our confession.

Part III: The result of our confession.

This is the part where many people get distracted from what the text really says. We’ve got Peter, which means rock. We’ve got a rock on which the Church is built. We’ve got Jesus handing out keys to heaven. And so, a man dies and meets Peter at the pearly gates. Right?

Not exactly. First of all, you can’t completely separate Peter from his confession. The Holy Christian Church is **“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”** Paul spoke of Peter, James, and John as having the reputation of **“pillars”** in the early church. But it wasn’t really built on the men, but rather on what those men believed and confessed. Jesus referred to Simon as **“Peter”** – rock man. Sometimes Peter was like a little pebble and sometimes he was like a boulder. His name can refer to either one. But then when Jesus immediately says, **“On this rock I will build my church,”** he’s no longer talking about Peter per se. He uses a different Greek word, although very similar. The rock upon which the Church is built isn’t Peter, but Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That’s the message of all the apostles and prophets. And when the supernatural forces of evil – led by the devil himself – rise up against the Church, they will not prevail. The Church cannot be overcome. That’s one result of our confession. We have the conviction of faith that the people of God will win out in the end. In fact, they already have.

Until that fact is revealed to all, we have two tools to carry out the Church’s work. Jesus gave the keys of heaven to Peter and to all believers to bind and loose sins. Simply put, those keys are the law and gospel. The law is used to crush people who are content in their own self-righteousness. To those who think they can earn heaven on their own, we say, **“Sorry, the door to heaven is locked tight. You’re still in your sins.”** To those who’ve been crushed by the law and see no way out, we unlock heaven’s door and say, **“Come! Enter! Taste the sweet message of free forgiveness. You’ve been set free from your sins by Jesus.”**

Those two keys have a single goal – to lead people to forsake their own works and abilities and to trust in Jesus alone. The result of our confession is that we use those tools faithfully.

Conclusion

Being confessional puts us in the vast minority of church bodies today. To say that we stand for something without budging an inch, means that we openly confess our opposition toward other things that are contrary to God’s revelation. In today’s **“let’s-just-be-friends”** world, that’s looked upon as judgmental and unloving. But may we never forget why we call ourselves confessional and how that dictates the way we carry out ministry. May we never hesitate to confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Amen.