

The Tenth Sunday After Pentecost • August 21, 2011

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Braun Campbell

Matthew 16:13-20

"Confessed"

Who do you say that Jesus is?

For these past several weeks, we have heard St. Matthew recount some of the miracles that Jesus was doing as he traveled around, teaching and ministering to the people. We have followed along with his disciples as they witnessed this man feeding thousands, walking on water, and casting out demons. If you've been reading along at home and catching up on those parts of the narrative that we haven't had as part of the weekly worship service, you'll know that in between some of these miraculous episodes, Jesus has been talking with delegates from the scribes and the Pharisees, upstanding members of Jewish society, who have traveled from Jerusalem to come and question this unusual teacher. They want to know who he is. People have been talking.

Who do you say that Jesus is?

The people of Jesus' day had come up with a whole slew of suggestions as to who he might be. His disciples had heard the things that people were saying about him. They knew people thought that Jesus was some sort of a prophet, someone sent by God to teach Israel and lead them in the way that Yahweh would have them go. But neither the crowds nor the political or religious authorities of the day knew just who this Jesus was. Might he be a great prophet from Israel's past, or someone else? The people had long been looking for a Deliverer who would bring freedom to their nation. Was Jesus that promised one?

Who do you say that Jesus is?

That's the big question in our Gospel text today, the one that Jesus asks his disciples to answer. They have heard him teach. They have seen the amazing things that he has done. Simon steps up and answers for the group: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Everything that we have been hearing from Matthew's Gospel in these summer months has been leading up to this confession: Jesus is the Christ! He is the one who has come from the *living* God, the one true God over and against the false gods that people have propped up on pedestals of wood and stone and heart and mind. Simon is speaking out the divine truth that has been revealed to him by that living God. The Christ – a Greek word that means "the anointed," equivalent to the Hebrew word "Messiah" – is that Deliverer that God had promised His people, the one who would be their prophet, priest, and king. In this statement of belief, this confession, Simon is acknowledging that Jesus is the one who holds the unique office of God's Anointed. Simon didn't come up with this idea in and of himself – God had been opening the eyes of the disciples to see the truth of who Jesus is. In response to Simon's confession that he is indeed the Christ, Jesus gives his disciple a new name, "Peter," similar to the Greek word for rock. **For it is on the rock of that "You, Jesus, are the Christ, the Son of the living God" confession that Jesus will build his church.**

Who do you say that Jesus is?

Across the centuries, the Church that Jesus continues to build has proclaimed that he alone is the Christ. In our worship service at St. John's each week, we give voice to our faith in words that have been handed down from generation to generation. We speak the words of the Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed, going into some detail about our belief as Christians. We say that we are followers of Christ, along with Simon Peter and the apostles, looking to Jesus alone as our Deliverer. **The only problem is that we don't always speak, think, or act that way!**

Who do you say that Jesus is?

No one who speaks the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed lives up to God's standard of perfection, not one. You might confess what you believe with your words in worship on the weekend, but what about your words the rest of the week? Are your thoughts always appropriate for someone who would be called a "Christian?" How might your actions show others – and yourself – that you are following your own god, not the living God and the identity that He has given you as His child? If a Christian is someone who confesses Jesus as the Christ, Son of the living God, then you and I are poor Christians indeed.

Who do you say that Jesus is?

We have heard that the people of Jesus' day expected the Christ to be some kind of Deliverer. **And so he is.** Jesus ordered Simon Peter and the other disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ, partly because the people has a pretty confused understanding of what the Christ was to do, and it would just get in the way of his mission. And his mission matters. It's the most important thing in the world, especially for us poor Christians, since **his mission is deliverance.** As the Christ, Jesus went to the cross to suffer and die for the life of the world, to fulfill his ultimate role as God's Anointed Deliverer. When you confess that Jesus is the Christ, take comfort in knowing that he is Christ for you, too, and that he has delivered you from everything that has kept you apart from the living God.

Who do you say that Jesus is?

After Simon Peter confessed Jesus as Christ, Jesus pronounced the man blessed because of what the Father had revealed to him. You, too, are blessed, because you too have been called to be a part of the Church wherein God's forgiveness is given and received. Such is the reality of the keys of the reign of heaven which Jesus gave to Simon Peter and his other disciples, to the Church which points to Jesus as Deliverer.

When you confess Jesus as Christ, you point to him as your hope. And when you share that strong word of God with the people around you, you serve as a conduit of God's grace. Any Christian can share God's forgiveness. The proclamation of Christ and his teaching binds and looses sin. God alone forgives sin, but you can be a "messenger," as it were, a **deliverer of the deliverance the Jesus won for the world.** As a Christian, if someone comes to you repenting of a sin and asking for God's forgiveness in Christ, you can use those keys Jesus gave to his Church to announce the forgiveness that they seek. This is amazing stuff! Through you and through your fellow Christians in the Church as you point to who Christ is and what he has taught us, God is opening the reign of heaven to all nations.

Forgiveness is a central part of our identity as Christians. If you have not intentionally practiced asking for, giving, and receiving forgiveness in your household, begin doing so today! The forgiveness that Jesus has brought into our lives is meant to be shared, for through it we point to Jesus as the Christ. That forgiveness, received and shared, will change our relationships with those around us even as it has changed our relationship with God. **We are delivered people.**

Simon Peter and the disciples confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. And joined with the Church that Jesus has built on the rock of that confession, we are doing the same. In our prayers, in the Creeds, in Holy Communion, we confess that he is the one who has come to deliver us. He has brought forgiveness into our lives and, through that forgiveness, access to our Father in heaven.

Who is Jesus? **He is Christ, for you.**

Amen.