

FOCUS: The Good News is we are saved by Christ alone (Sixth in a series)

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, as noted in the bulletin, we are celebrating the Confession of St. Peter. This is not a confession in the sense of the confession of sins, but rather a confession of faith. In the sixteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel, we have this famous conversation between Jesus and his disciples during which Jesus seeks to hear from them what others are saying about who Jesus is. From the mouth of the uneducated, brash, and sometimes wrong Peter, we hear those remarkable words: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."¹

What is remarkable about this confession of faith—one of the most basic creedal statements of the church—is that Peter, as Jesus notes, doesn't really know why he said it. Peter comes to know the true identity of Jesus as he—and everyone else—does. His confession of faith comes by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, Luther writes: "I believe that I cannot come to my Lord Jesus Christ by my own intelligence or power. But the Holy Spirit call me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as He calls, gathers together, enlightens and makes holy the whole Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus in the one, true faith."² This is as true for Peter and for us today as it was when Luther penned the words some five hundred years ago. If we rely on the power of the human mind alone to comprehend the saving gift God has given us in Christ Jesus, we can never come to true faith and belief. Why? Well, the story of Jesus is just too remarkable to be true if one considers it only on the basis of available evidence and witness in the historical record.

Throughout the course of Christian history, men and women have sought to definitively prove the ministry of Jesus Christ by searching the historical record. Even today, some scholars debate what Jesus said or did, casting votes on the degree of confidence they hold that a given saying or act was "authentic." To seek to understand the mission, ministry, and work of the man called Jesus of Nazareth is understandable. However, one must question the value of casting colored stones into a box as the method of determining that upon which millions place their faith.

So, as we hear in our gospel text this morning, it is Simon, the fisherman brother of Andrew, who speaks out first. Now, you might wonder a bit about the words of Jesus in commending Simon. It's a play on words in Greek, actually. The name "Peter" is *Petros* in Greek. The

¹ Matt 16:16 (NRSV)

² SC, Part II

word for “rock” is *petra*. So here we have the connection made clear for us as to the calling of Simon *Peter* and why it is upon this *rock* that Christ will build the church.

And, starting with Peter and the other disciples, Jesus sets the foundation for the community of faith that would grow far beyond the ability for Peter and the others to comprehend. By the power of the Holy Spirit, which the risen Christ breathed onto the disciples and which descended upon them as flames from heaven on the first Pentecost after Christ’s ascension into heaven, these apostles and disciples took the Word of God and the Good News of the saving gift which the Father gave to all of creation in the life, death, and resurrection of the Son to the people. Peter was *not* an educated man. He was, after all, a simple fisherman when Jesus called him to follow and learn. Yet Peter, as we heard in the fourth chapter of Acts this morning, *amazed* the leaders and elders of the people when he spoke about the power of Jesus Christ, in whose name Peter had healed a man. And it is Jesus who is the cornerstone—the most important stone in the foundation of a building, and the stone from which all other stones are positioned. Indeed, Peter was a part of the foundation that Jesus was laying for the future.

So, then, what does all this mean for us today? The real truth of the Gospel comes out in the words of Peter in the passage from Acts. “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”³

We are not saved by the government. We are not saved by our own works and deeds. We are not saved by the wisdom of our own minds. We are not saved by Peter, Paul, Mary, or even Art. We are saved by Jesus the Christ, Son of God and son of man. This is the culmination, if you will, of God’s plan for our salvation. This truly is a bold, even radical, statement of faith.

By confessing that only Jesus Christ can save us, we are taking a firm stand on solid ground in the world. It is a position upon which that many today—even some Christian theologians—will try to skirt around or add an asterisk. “Well, Jesus isn’t the only way to be saved,” some say. “There are other religions that are just as good and proper.” I respond to you boldly, “Hogwash!” *Nothing* in this world can offer the *assurance* of our salvation *except* Jesus Christ. Peter was absolutely correct when he made that declaration, and he’s still correct today.

I will not stand before you and tell God who he can and cannot save. For all I know, God does indeed grant grace to everyone equally and fully—believers and non-

³ Acts 4:12 (NRSV)

believers. *However*, I will stand before you and declare the words of Peter are my words as well.

Who is Jesus, the son of man? He is the Messiah, Son of the living God! There is no salvation in anyone else. This is my confession to you, by brothers and sisters. Thanks be to God!