

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Tenth Sunday after Trinity, August 9, 2015**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 348, 349:1, 433, 352, 536:6.

Lessons: Exodus 6:1-8, Romans 11:33-36, Matthew 4:18-20.

Sermon Text: Matthew 16:13-19.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Jesus is drawing to the close of his work on earth.

He starts this discussion by asking his disciples ***“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”*** His question is a teaching question, using one of his favorite descriptions of himself from Daniel 7.

His disciples obviously had been paying attention to what people had been saying about him. ***“They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’”*** Some of these ideas of the people may be a reference to Malachi 4:5: ***“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.”*** It is also possible that the evil intentions and slander of the Pharisees and Sadducees had been affecting some people. They either believed that one of the prophets, such as John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah, had been raised from the dead, or they may have thought, according to Pharisaical false teaching, that the soul and spirit of one of these prophets had come to new life in Jesus.

Christ was indeed a prophet, but he was more. But the people did not think highly enough of him, and then Jesus asks his disciples who they say and believe he is. We are reminded from Peter’s confession that

**JESUS IS “THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD.”**

1. ***“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”***
2. **Peter’s rock-solid confession – and our confession.**

Who do people today say Jesus is? Who do people think Jesus is and what his work is? Some think of him as no more than the illegitimate son of a poor girl from Nazareth. Others may think of him as a lawgiver like Moses, come to bring new laws to the world. Others recognize Jesus as only a great teacher or prophet, as even the Muslims do. Many think of him as some kind of pretender, claiming to be what he is not. In Jesus’ day, people at least had some religious reference for Jesus. Today it is rare that you might find a ‘man on the street’ claiming that Jesus is the very Son of God.

But Jesus’ disciples had learned from spending time with him who he really was.

They had seen his miracles, they had heard his preaching for nearly three years, they had seen his rejection by the religious leaders of the Jews and they had a very different picture. Is it because they were such great or religious people themselves? No. The Holy Spirit had worked faith in them, as Jesus tells Peter.

When Peter makes his bold confession telling Jesus ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”*** Jesus makes clear how Peter came to this knowledge. ***“Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.’”*** This is the kind of confession that can only come from faith. And God makes it clear that ***“faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*** (Romans 10:17 NIV) You may have memorized that passage as ***“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*** (KJV)

Here is a confession of the Christian faith. Peter recognized and confessed Jesus to be the long-awaited Savior of the world.

Some people who have come to believe in Jesus may think that they are smart enough to conclude that Jesus is God's Son all by themselves. People may even think that they can decide to come to faith in Jesus Christ by themselves. But that is not the case at all. We confess with Luther "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

Thus Jesus tells Peter that he didn't come to this knowledge and confession by himself, or by the work of any human being. God had brought him to this point in his life.

And we, too, must confess that it is God who has brought us to this point in our lives where we accept and believe in Jesus as our only Savior from all our sins. We were totally passive in our conversion to faith in God, as we read in Jeremiah: "***turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God.***" (Jeremiah 31:18 KJV)

At a time in history when people take such great pride in our human wisdom and learning and abilities without God that we are so sure that we know the beginnings of the entire universe, and what is happening in the heavens far, far away – millions of times the distance that light could travel in a year! – we must humbly confess before God that he is the supreme architect of the universe – and more! With the Psalmist we confess "***Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.***" (Psalms 115:1) Paul asks the question: "***What do you have that you did not receive?***" (1 Corinthians 4:7) The Christian religion is a revealed religion, that is, it was not developed from the mind of man.

Notice the details of Peter's confession: "***You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.***" Peter was privileged to know Jesus Christ first-hand. But that doesn't give him any better chance at faith. We are reminded of Jesus' words to Thomas after the resurrection: "***Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'***" (John 20:29 NIV)

Peter calls him "***the Christ.***" Christ is the word which means "the anointed", the anointed one whom God sent to save the world from sin. This is a translation of the Old Testament word "Messiah." From the time of God's first promise to Eve in the Garden of Eden, believers in God had been looking forward to the arrival and work of the one who would crush the head of the serpent, Satan.

Countless believers had confessed faith in the coming anointed one of the Lord. The anointing of the Old Testament foreshadowed the coming Savior who was the very Son of God, the one anointed to suffer and die for the sins of all mankind.

Peter also is confessing that Jesus is "***the Son of the living God.***" This is a very simple confession, and it is all that was needed while Jesus was on earth. However, because of a great deal of false teaching and work by Satan, it has become necessary for us to have a much longer confession of who Jesus really is. This progression of history that men deny and reject Jesus the Christ as the very Son of God is obvious even in our universal creeds. The Apostolic Creed, which we confess on most Sundays, has eight printed lines in the hymnal which confess who Jesus is. The Nicene Creed, composed much later, which we use on Communion Sundays, has sixteen printed lines. And the Athanasian Creed, composed even later, has an entire page in the hymnal! So violently does Satan attack the truths of God and his Word.

Jesus called himself the "***Son of Man***" but they recognized him to be "***the Son of the living God.***"

Then comes Jesus' comment to Peter, which has been much misunderstood. After Peter's marvelous confession "***Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I 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.'***"

We don't really know how this man received the name "Peter". From the beginning of the mention of his name, he is referred to as "***Simon called Peter***". (Matthew 4:18) This helps us – and all followers of Jesus – keep him separate from "Simon the Canaanite", who in the New International Version is called "Simon the Zealot", another of the twelve apostles of Jesus.

Jesus tells Peter that he is "***blessed***". This blessedness comes from God, and all true believers are truly blessed. The Lord adds a promise for the entire Church till the end of time.

In order for us to identify and refute a particular false teaching based on this passage, we must go outside of the Scriptures, to tradition. The tradition and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church claim that these words make Peter the head of the Apostles and also the head of the entire Christian church on earth. That church also claims that Peter worked in Rome and became the first bishop of Rome. The bishop of Rome is now called the Pope. But what does the Scripture say?

Jesus tells him, with what many have called a play on words, that upon Peter's rocklike confession he will build his Church. He does not say: 'On you, Peter', but: ***"on this rock I will build my church."***

In the Greek Jesus said 'You are *Petros*, and on this *petra* I will build my church. *Petros* means a loose rock, a stone, while *petra* means a rocky cliff, the kind of rock on which the wise man built his house. Another difference, not often emphasized in the English language, is that *petros* is a masculine noun while *petra* is a neuter noun.

Luther expresses it this way: 'On this rock, ... upon the confession of faith which makes you a rock, I will build my Church. This foundation can hold and is strong enough so that the devil will not be able to throw it over or throw it down.' Against this Church, because it is built upon this rock of confession, the gates of hell cannot prevail, all the powers of hell cannot conquer it. It is strong and enduring, so long as faith in the Father and in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Redeemer, and in the Holy Spirit rules in the church on earth.

Jesus here gives to Peter, and to the entire Christian Church, that is, to all who believe, the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Keys are used to unlock and to lock. The keys are an emblem of the power which admits someone in or prevents any unauthorized person from entering into a house. In this case, the house is the "house" of God, that is, the Holy Christian Church. Christ, the Son of God, ***"holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open."*** (Revelation 3:7) And Jesus gives that authority to forgive sins or to retain sins to his church on earth. Jesus has earned for all sinners mercy and salvation. And this power and authority he gives to his believing disciples. Whoever believes has part in Christ and in all that Christ possesses. Whoever believes is in the kingdom of heaven, has forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, and may and shall impart also to others the treasures of the kingdom.

Jesus also says ***"the gates of Hades will not overcome it"*** that is, the gates of hell. The gates of hell are the powers and attacks of the devil's kingdom, by which Satan makes war against Jesus Christ and all his followers. These fight against the church by opposing gospel truths, corrupting gospel teachings, and doing such things as persecuting Christians. The goal of the "gates of hell" is to destroy Christianity. But this will not happen.

Throughout all the struggles which we must endure, Peter assures us in his letter that believers are those ***"who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."*** (1 Peter 1:5)

And so Peter's confession is our confession, too. We believe with all our hearts and confess to anyone who will listen and for the whole world that Jesus is ***"the Christ, the Son of the living God."*** Lord, help us remain firm in that confession until the end! Amen.