

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Ninth Sunday after Trinity, August 9, 2009

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Hymns: 355, 352:1, 380, 348, 353: 1-3.
Lessons: I Zechariah 13: 7-9, Galatians 3: 21-29, John 6: 59-71.
Text: Matthew 16:13-17
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The name of our church body is the “Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship”. Although this was originally thought of by some as just a sort of temporary name in 1983 until we could come up with a better name, its words have a great deal of meaning. We are a confessional church or fellowship. That means that we believe in something, that we make a confession before the world. That confession includes everything that we say “I believe...” to. The best example is of course, the Bible, the very Word of God. But we also include the creeds: the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed (found on page 53 in the hymnal). We admit, we confess, we claim that we believe in something. We take our stand on something. And one of the very most important things we confess is that

JESUS IS REALLY THE SAVIOR, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD

- 1. Whom do people say that he is?**
- 2. Whom do believers confess that he is?**

The opinions of the people showed that they regarded Jesus very highly as a special man of God, but they did not regard him highly enough. They did not know him as the one and only Son of God, true God with the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity. They were not much different from many people of our own day who may praise Jesus as a good man or a great teacher but don't know him as their Savior from all their sins and the only Savior of the world.

Peter, who often spoke first and acted as spokesman for the rest, was ready with an excellent answer: ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*** Christ means the Anointed, the Messiah. So Peter recognized and confessed Jesus to be the long-awaited Savior of the world, and the very Son of the living God, not of some pagan idol.

Peter had a long way to go as a follower of Jesus, as we remember from his denial in the courtyard of the high priest. But Jesus commended Peter for his confession, and he reminded him that no one could have figured that out by himself. Peter knew because the Father had revealed this truth to him. In the same way, those of us who know Jesus as our Lord and Savior have not come to that conviction by figuring it out for ourselves or by making a conscious decision to believe in Jesus. We know Jesus as our Savior only because God the Holy Spirit, through the power of the gospel, has graciously created saving faith in our hearts.

Luke gives us more details of this incident when he records ***"Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say I am?'"*** Jesus asked his disciples what people were saying about him. As the omniscient, all-knowing Son of God, he would know, but he wants his disciples to be aware of whom they were to tell the gospel to. These words were spoken as it became more and more evident to Jesus that the large majority of people in the region of Galilee rejected him in unbelief. And hostility increased, and would continue to increase. He was becoming less of a prophet or preacher who would

give them free meals through his miracles and less of a healer of their earthly diseases, and more of a troublesome preacher to the leaders of the Jews. The region was, according to historians, primarily pagan although it was near lands where God's chosen people, the Jews lived. The population was chiefly Gentile.

"Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." What do you hear about Jesus the Christ? His disciples pointed out that many had false ideas about who he is. Some were thinking and saying he was one of the prophets come back from the dead. The answers suggest that people were thinking only of Jesus as a forerunner, a precursor to the Messiah. But he did not fulfill the political expectations of the people. They expected a "messiah" who would rescue them from the rule of the Romans.

They didn't recognize him as the true God-sent Messiah, the Son of God himself. When Jesus speaks of himself as the ***"Son of Man"*** he is surely hoping his closest followers would recognize him also as the Son of God. So there were many who didn't know who he really is.

What about today? Who is Jesus Christ? Is he just a cuss word? Is his name merely a name used for cursing? Surely you've heard that abuse of God's name in breaking the second commandment, so there must be many who think of Jesus Christ in only that way.

Or is Jesus just a good example, someone whom we should pattern our lives after? A great prophet, as the Muslims believe? A great teacher, or a nonviolent protester like Ghandi and the 20th century civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.?

How do people speak of Christ today? One 20th century writer claiming to be a Christian theologian "reduces the 'Christ' of the New Testament to the achievement of authentic selfhood by a believer in terms of existentialist philosophy". (Whatever that means!) "Humanists have carried this method a step further and "demythologized" God into 'man at his best.' (A Handbook of Christian Theology, page 51, World Publishing, 1958) So Jesus is just an example of a good man.

But even to the shame of the name Lutheran, a seminary professor in the ELCA – you even know members of the ELCA, don't you – wrote "What do Christians mean today when they confess (in the words of the Nicene Creed) that Jesus Christ 'came down from heaven ...and was made man'? When we no longer understand the universe to consist of heaven 'up above', the earth in the middle, and an 'underworld' beneath us, it is at least difficult and more likely impossible for Christians to take this language literally. But what does it mean to speak of Jesus as 'divine'? Does not this word also call for some interpretation? Theologians today are concerned to interpret the divinity of Jesus in a manner which avoids turning him into a bizarre, mythological creature who contains both a divine nature and a human nature." (What's Going On Among the Lutherans?, page 99, Northwestern Publishing House, 1992) Now maybe not every member of the ELCA believes that specific idea but they are part of, they are members of a church that tolerates speaking of Jesus Christ as a "bizarre, mythological creature who contains both a divine nature and a human nature."

How many people do you know who do not confess that Jesus is the very Son of God, or are members of such a heterodox church? There are probably an awful lot of people out there who don't believe and confess what we confess with Peter. And how often do you have an opportunity – whenever and wherever – to tell them that you believe Jesus Christ is your Savior, both true God and true man.

The question about who people say Jesus is led to another question: ***"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."***

The answer for the twelve, and for all true followers of Jesus, as given by Peter, is the very one Christ hoped for. It is also our answer. Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man, our Christ, our Messiah, our Savior and our Redeemer. Jesus is holy, the one set apart by God and consecrated, anointed, to carry out God's mission. The name Christ was even used by the angel in the birth announcement to the shepherds. Now one of his closest followers, Peter, uses the name.

Peter tells us who Jesus is, and he is also talking about Jesus' work as Redeemer. Peter also made a similar confession in a different context later in Jesus' ministry as John records and as you heard in our Gospel lesson this morning. ***"Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."*** John 6:68-69.

Peter made a marvelous confession on at least two occasions. You have learned, or are learning who Jesus Christ is, and we are learning more every time we hear or read the Word of God.

Mark and Luke record this idea: ***"Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again."*** At this time in his ministry, he was not ready to suffer and to die. The time was not yet. He also tells them what must happen to him to fulfill his work, his mission on earth. So he tells them at this time not to say anything about him. But for us, the time to confess Jesus is every day and any day and any time.

We must make confession in our lives of who Jesus is. Jesus tells us in Luke 12:8-9: ***"Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God."*** (KJV) ***"I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God."*** (NIV) We have no choice but to confess Jesus Christ today. With Peter and John after Pentecost, we must say repeatedly to ourselves – and to others: ***"For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."*** Acts 4:20.

Many people even today deny who Jesus Christ really is, or they do not confess who Jesus Christ really is. We know Jesus as our Savior only because God the Holy Spirit, through the power of the gospel, has graciously created saving faith in our hearts.

And so, with Peter we confess to one another and with one another this morning,

"I believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

May we, every chance we get, make the kind of confession Peter did. God grant this! Amen.