

Son of Man, Son of God
Matthew 16:13-20
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 27, 2017

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, *He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

What do you make of Peter's confession? Is it too simplistic? Too cryptic? Is it yours?

That last question may be a more pressing question than we realize... especially as we live in a world and amongst a people that are willing to agree with what the *crowds* say of Jesus much more than with what *Peter* says of Jesus. A good teacher? Sure the crowds will go along with that. A prophet? Even our Muslim friends will acknowledge that. But, the Christ? – and that term Christ not being his last name, but his divinely exclusive title of the bringer of salvation – being the Christ and the Son of the living God? The crowds won't go there.

Peter's confession is spot on, isn't it? It would be easy to agree with it simply because we hear Jesus commend him. But do we agree with it because we grasp what it captures? That's a worthy meditation, isn't it?!

First of all, that Jesus is the Christ. Peter lists this first because it is of primary importance. The Christ is God's chosen, the

anointed one long-expected (how often do we hear the Old Testament prophecies anticipate him, and how often does the question come early in the Gospels – could this be the Christ? Are you the Christ, or should we expect another?) ... yes, He's the Christ *expected* and *sent* specifically because our sins condemn us. Have you ever realized you are confessing that when you call Jesus the Christ? If we can overcome our sin, we need no Christ. If we can wrestle with and pay for that sin with just a bit of help from above, a burst of pious energy, a spiritual sugar-rush from the sacraments... we don't need the Christ.

That the Christ comes shows the desperate straits we sinners are in. (Perhaps that's why the world hates/ignores the title!) But, that Jesus is the Christ is also a reminder of *why* and *how* Jesus comes. He comes to die for sins, He comes to invade human history in human flesh and take to the cross specifically because our salvation rests on this and nothing else. Of what matter would any other earthly concern be if we still had to worry about the weight of our sin? If our sin cannot be atoned for, all else is vain. Thus, of first importance, Jesus is the one chosen by God, anointed by God, appointed by God to suffer death in our place as our substitute. This gracious disposition of God toward sinners is of first importance. On this hope, faith rests, for if God is *against* us, who can be of any help in being *for* us?

But of second importance (not in rank, but in explanation) is that this Christ sent for us is the Son of the living God. What good is the chosen instrument of our salvation if he is merely man? How is his substitutionary death of any benefit? What good is the Son of Man if he is not also the Son of God? And not just the Son of God, but of *the living* God!... a lot of gods out there, false divinities, your wallet, reputation, pride, “independence”...all of it serving the greatest idol of all – yourself curved in on itself... but none of these are *living* gods... none of them can hear your prayer or answer it. There’s only one *living* God, and the Son of Man is *His* Son.

But, that the Son of Man *is* the Son of God, and that the Son of God is the Son of Man, is of greatest comfort and benefit. Suddenly we have from Peter’s lips and in one statement of confession this divine incomprehensible mystery (there’s no way it can simply be deciphered through reason or logic, with the result that our children in their imaginations understand the mystery better than we adults in our logic!)... that God chose to become flesh, and that this man born of Mary is the very God of heaven and earth.

This mystery – that the *Son of God* is simultaneously the *Son of Man* – guarantees us that our God is intimately with us (that’s what *Immanuel* means!), that he is so patient and gentle and sympathetic that he knows and provides for our every need, and has compassion enough for every sinner; but that the *Son of Man* is the

Son of God also guarantees us that our God in the flesh still has all authority, power, and might over the devil, the world, the whole creation and cosmos.

One ought never mistake the incarnate God as having given up his holiness, his omnipotence, eternal nature, his power and might:

When watching the solar eclipse with my wife and sister and our kids, the comment was made: "This won't be the last time the peoples look to the heavens." But when that last day comes, no pair of special glasses will shield their eyes from the brilliance of the glory of the Son of God; nor will they be needed, for He will descend the Son of Man (in his same own flesh and blood crucified at Calvary, raised on the third day). Didn't the angel say at his ascension, "Men, He will come as you saw him go." Yes, on that day, there will be no trivial celebration of the sun aligning with the moon, and yet the sun and moon will align as they together bow before the Son of Man who comes in his glory accompanied with legions of angels. And where there will be no trivial celebration, there will be undeniable and universal understanding of who this Son of Man is... every knee will bow and every tongue will confess ... and, for many, that will mean the weeping and gnashing of teeth, because the crowds and the peoples of generations wrote him off as merely a good teacher or a prophet. But, for the Church, there will be vindication and joy, for she had with Peter confessed him to be the Christ.

That term – Jesus is *the Christ*; the Son of Man is the Son of the living God – that term is no trite matter or trivial confession. “Blessed are you... for it is not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by the heavenly Father.” That you can rightly confess something so wrongly understood by the whole world when you use that term ‘Christ’ is nothing short of a divine gift... revealed to you from above. *You* may think it nothing special, but *Jesus* knows it’s nothing short of a divine gift! “Blessed are you,” Jesus says to you, “for this is revealed to you not by birth into a Lutheran family or by worldly wisdom or rationalism or scientific discovery or by your individualized notions of ‘relative truth’... it is revealed to you by the work of the Holy Spirit and through the Holy Word that comes from above.

“That which is born of flesh is flesh; that which is born of spirit is spirit.” “Unless one is begotten from above, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” What joy and blessing that you have been given the gift of faith to confess with Peter, “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Such a wonderful gift is this confession that God has made it the foundation of truth on which the Church is built, on which she stands, by which she is fed and sustained! Consider the Holy Supper each Lord’s Day... the magnitude of what it means that the Son of God deigns to dwell with you... that the glory of heaven stoops to meet you! I asked someone recently, “What would you do if God

showed up this second and stood before you? How would you greet Him?" After the individual gave his/her response, I said, "And that's exactly what happens every Divine Service!... the Lord arrives in his very body and blood... that's the magnitude of this holy hour, that the Son of God comes in the humility of his stature as Son of Man, and yet in and behind that humble veil dwells all the glory of what is confessed by Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And, it's precisely because that is happening each Sunday, that the Son of God in all his glory is *humbly* – the Son of Man – dwelling with us in hidden, veiled form, evoking the awestruck fear and reverence of all who believe! (precisely because that *is* what occurs) – that he prepares us by granting us the very comfort of heavenly inheritance itself when he says, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

If it is no joke to confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, then it is equally no joke – but the proclamation from that same Son of the living God– that fills our ears, "I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Thus, as the Lord declares through the prophet, "Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation... My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out." Isn't that the

foundational promise on which the Church stands and the very reason that the gates of hell can never prevail against us?

Hell can take *much* from you... forget hell, *society* can take much from you... they can take daily bread of all sorts: they can take your reputation and label you 'intolerant' as you unwaveringly hold to the exclusivity of Christ; they can take your businesses and freedoms by labeling your confession of salvation through Christ alone as 'hate speech;' they can take your temporal joys and toys, and more seriously, your children's allegiances or even your spouse or life, but they cannot take from you the visitation of our God: "My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out." The whole world, the gates of hell itself, cannot take from you the forgiveness of sins that makes you one with God through the death of Christ... and, as Luther says, where you have the forgiveness of sins, you have life and salvation... for where you have the forgiveness of sins, you have redemption in the Son of Man and you have an ally in the Son of the living God. You have certainty in Christ's compassion and grace, and you have certainty that the same Christ will one day come in his glory, riding upon the clouds to the sound of the trumpet, flanked by his angels. Therefore, thank God for this faith and confession, for it is revealed to you from heaven; and, thank God that faith is no 'faith in lifeless dogma,' but in the truth that the Christ who was once in history revealed to the world to pay for your sins will one day be revealed again to the world to vindicate your

hope; thus, to that same heaven from which is revealed your faith, lift up your heads in patient hope and know that your redemption draws nigh.

Until then, your hope is *patient*... willing to be patient, though the crowds leave and the world mocks... patient because we learn to see the inheritance of God's glory through the Christ of God's grace. That Jesus asks the disciples "Who is the Son of *Man*"... that he focuses on who the Son of *Man* is, reminds us that *He* – the lowly Son of Man – is our focus and our hope. He teaches us to seek the holy God through the humble Messiah; the transcendent God through the incarnate and crucified Lord; the holy One through the sin-bearer, the righteous One through the redeemer, the hope in the resurrection and our future glory through the suffering of Christ's sacrifice and through the veil of our daily crosses.

Who do you say that the Son of Man is: He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Thus, (consider the significance in saying it the other way): Who do you say is the Christ, the Son of the Living God? Indeed, it is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man.

In the Name of the Father
 And of the Son
 And of the Holy Spirit.
 + AMEN +