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Pentecost 10

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“What Do You Say?”

Text: Matthew 16:13-20 (Isaiah 51:1-6; Romans 11:33-12:8)

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

Where there is revelation, there is confession. Where there is confession, there is revelation. The two always go together. You cannot confess what is not revealed, and what is revealed must be confessed.

And so it is in the Holy Gospel today. Peter confesses what has been revealed to him by the Father. Jesus asks: **“Who do you say that I am?”** And Peter confesses: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** And this confession is the rock on which Christ builds His church.

That revelation must take place before confession is inherent in the definition of the word confess. For to confess doesn't simply mean to admit you're wrong – it literally means *to say the same thing*. And so the Church, in confessing, speaks back to God what He has spoken to us. *We say the same thing* – for what He says is sure and true. And so we hear His Word, and as we believe, we speak. We confess who He is, as He has told us, in the Creed. We confess who we are, as He has told us, in the confession of sin. We confess His salvation, as He has told us, in the liturgy, in the hymns, and in receiving His gifts in His Supper.

**And all of this comes from God.** Peter doesn't get credit from Jesus for coming up with the correct answer! Jesus instead states that this answer didn't come from within Peter at all, but from outside of Him. It was *revealed* to Him. . . . And so it must be in the church. We do not believe what we choose to believe. We do not speak what we want to speak. We do not change what we want to change. Our confession doesn't come from within us, but from outside of us. And that revelation enables our confession.

For as St. Paul said, **“Who has known the mind of the Lord?” “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”** And so if God did not reveal Himself to us - in His Word and in His Word made flesh - we would not know Him, and could not confess Him. For as Paul goes on to say, everything is **from Him and through Him and** [then back] **to Him.**

And so confessing the truth does not mean speaking our own thoughts or opinions or wisdom, what we think is true or would like to be true - it is to speak the truth revealed to us by God in His Word. To say the same thing. We cannot do otherwise.

But we are tempted to do otherwise, aren't we? Tempted to not say the same thing. Tempted to not speak at all and to remain silent. Tempted to doubt and mistrust what God has told us in His Word; that what He has told us is not so sure and true; that perhaps there are other ways, different ways, better ways. And those are great temptations because our confession is being attacked from many directions these days, and quite frankly, it is easier not to confess, isn't it? To just keep our mouths shut and not cause trouble, or to just go along with what others are doing and saying. Confessing can be dangerous - to friendships, to popularity, and in some places, to your life.

But what does Jesus say about Peter's great confession? ***"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!"*** To know the truth and to confess the truth may be hard and it may be dangerous, but with it comes great blessing. Not blessing as the world thinks of blessings, of receiving riches and honor and privilege. Those are things that, as Isaiah said, will ***vanish like smoke*** and ***wear out like a garment***. That are here today and gone tomorrow. That come and go with every stock market crash, every dot com bubble, every housing market collapse, every revolution or disaster or tragedy.

No, the blessings that comes with confessing Christ transcend and endure all those things, for they are eternal blessings. Blessings that cannot be taken away. Blessings that for now may not be able to be seen, but are a matter of faith. Peter received these blessings, even though he faced many hardships, and had many ups and downs, and doubts and difficulties, and even suffered martyrdom. *And they are yours as well.* Yes, blessed are you in confessing Christ, despite what you may seem or feel or what may happen to you. Blessed are you, for you are sons and daughters of God, receiving from Him what only He can give.

What those blessings are Jesus then goes on to describe. Blessings that are, in fact, *promised* to you. The first is that ***"on this rock I will build my church."*** As you confess Christ and His work, to friends, to family, to neighbors, you have His promise that He is building His church. You may not see it. You may not know how. It may not seem like your confession is doing anything good at all. But again, do not rely on what you see or feel - rely on the promise of Christ, that through your confession, He is building His church. Bringing others into it, and keeping you in it. He is working in others - and in you! - through His Word and Spirit. It is not up to you. It is His work, and He is working. You can count on it.

The second promise Christ gives with this confession is that ***"the gates of hell shall***

**not prevail against it.**" Which means that while the sin and evil in this world may seem quite powerful and threatening, against the power of Christ and His cross they cannot prevail. Whatever is threatening you, whatever is tempting you, whatever is attacking your faith, whatever is trying to cause you to doubt and despair, you are not alone in this fight. On your own, you cannot stand against the gates of hell. But you are not on our own! The One who fought for you on the cross, descended victorious into hell, and then rose again from the dead, is with you, fighting for you, and defending you. Satan will try to make it look like he is winning and prevailing over you - but do not believe it. Believe this promise of Christ to you.

And then finally, last but certainly not least, with the confession of Christ comes His promise of forgiveness. **"I will give you the keys to the kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven."** Through the preaching of the Law and the Gospel, Christ is working. That we may know our sin and its seriousness, but even more, so that we may know Christ and His forgiveness. The forgiveness won for you in His death and resurrection. The forgiveness that is greater than every sin. The forgiveness you hear and that is given to you, here in this place, every Sunday. The forgiveness that is not the word of man, but the powerful and true Word of God. The forgiveness that is yours by grace through faith in Christ. The forgiveness for every sinful thought, word, deed, or desire; for your silence when you should have spoken; for your doubt and fear; for all your failures. The forgiveness that means we need not be plagued by doubt or worry or fear about how God looks at you, or if He loves you or not. The cross proves that He does. And Jesus' empty tomb proves that that love is not dead, but alive, and that Jesus' promises of blessing, building, protection, and forgiveness are not dead, but are alive and given to you.

And with the **revelation** of such great and precious promises, given to us by Christ our Saviour, we **confess**. We say the same thing. We acknowledge Him and His grace and goodness toward us. Grace and goodness that we in no way deserve. And we rejoice to do so, knowing that while our confession may not be welcomed by many in this world, it is needed by so many. So many – like us – who need to hear that there is a God and Saviour who loves them, who died for them, and who does not want to throw them away or get rid of them, but wants to adopt them into His family through baptism, forgive them, and feed them here with His very own Body and Blood.

And with the revelation of such great and precious promises, given to us by Christ our Saviour, we confess also - again as St. Paul said - not just by our words, but by **offering ourselves as living sacrifices**. Laying down our lives for others, not in death, but by living in love, in service, in forgiveness, in care, in mercy, in being the voice of those who cannot speak for themselves, giving of our time, our energy, our material blessings, our abilities, to serve those in need. Not because we have to,

but because we can; because Christ has so loved us; because Christ has set us free from having to serve ourselves with His service to us; because the Word and Spirit of Christ transforms you, your way of thinking, and your way of life. That you no longer ***be conformed to this world***, but conformed to the image of Christ, whom you confess. ***For from him and through him and to him are all things***. Your confession and your life.

So ***who do you say that I am?*** Peter confessed, but the question was addressed to all the disciples. And so to you. And the truth has been revealed to you. The truth of our Saviour. The truth of His death and resurrection for the life of the world. The truth of His promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation. That this has been revealed to you is a great blessing, and you are blessed. Now it is time to confess. In word and deed, to say the same thing. We simply cannot do otherwise.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.