23 August 2020 Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Pentecost 12 Vienna, VA

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"For the Life of the World"
Text: Matthew 16:13-20 (Romans 11:33-12:8)

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

What's in a name?

Well, apparently, a lot these days. If you have the wrong name. School districts, counties, and states are willing to spend millions of dollars to change the names of schools, buildings, roads, and holidays which bear a name now deemed unworthy of such an honor. Those names were good, apparently, at one point. But no longer. And so they must go. Along with statues and anything else associated with them.

Perhaps some of that is good. Perhaps some is overdone. You could argue whether the expenditure of such money is good stewardship, or if that money could be better spent elsewhere and in other ways. But it does point out the reality that your good name today may not be a good name tomorrow.

Which is a good warning for those who are trying to make a name for themselves in this world and life. A name that might make them famous now and then live on after they die. To be their legacy. Well, be careful. Your memory may not be what you think. Sometimes the bad is forgotten and the good lives on. But sometimes, too, it is the other way around.

Who do you say that I am?

Jesus asks that question today. But His concern is different than what's going on today. For it is not for Himself that Jesus is concerned that His name live on, but **for you**. For *there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved* (Acts 4:12). So this confession is not just so that Jesus' name will live on after He dies, but so that YOU will live after YOU die. So there's a lot riding on His name.

And Simon replies on behalf of all: ***You are the Christ, the Son of the living God***.

Now, three weeks ago, we heard the story of when Jesus fed over 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. A pretty great miracle. Two weeks ago, we heard of

Jesus and Simon walking on the water, on the Sea of Galilee. Again, pretty great stuff. And last week, Jesus answered the prayer of a Canaanite mother and freed her daughter from demon oppression. Powerful stuff. But this today, these words of Simon today, are a greater miracle than those. For here is not a weak heart made strong, or an empty heart filled, or a struggling heart strengthened, but a stoney, hard-as-granite heart, a heart born rebellious and against God, turned into a confessing and believing heart. A miracle that happens here, too. In you.

And this is a greater miracle also because its result is greater. Jesus showers blessings and miracles on all in this world and life - He continues to feed, and care, and protect, and give life. But this miracle of confessing Jesus is not just for this life, for a while, but for a life that will not end. A life that will last forever.

So Simon's confession here isn't something he came up with on his own, after weighing the evidence, after careful study and reasoning - it was a miracle; the work of God in him. ***Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!*** Jesus says. ***For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you,*** - especially his own flesh and blood! - ***but my Father who is in heaven***. Perhaps Jesus is referring to the voice of the Father that spoke from heaven at Jesus' baptism: *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased* (Matthew 3:17). Or maybe the Father working through His Word and Spirit in Simon's heart. But however it was given, this confession was <u>given</u> to Simon, as it was given to you.

And everything rests on this confession; on Jesus' name. How surprised Simon must have been at Jesus' next words - not the ones commending him (for he really didn't do anything!), but expressing how powerful this name of Jesus is! That ***on this confession*** (not on miracles!) will ***the church be built***, and that ***the gates of hell will not prevail against it.*** So what's in a name? A lot! When it's Jesus' name!

Which is why it is so concerning when the name of Jesus is taken away today, or stripped of its power. When it is said that Jesus is <u>not</u> the only name that saves. When churches that used to be named after our Lord or those who confessed Him are now given trendy names instead, like *The Journey*. Or when His name is more often used in shock and pain than in confession. I often point this out to my catechumens - that you never hear the names of other gods used this way. No one ever hits their thumb with a hammer and then cries out "Oh Buddha!" or "Oh Allah!" Only Jesus Christ. Why is that? It's the only name satan cares about. The only name that saves. And so the only name he wants to rob of it's special character and power.

A similar problem is when the name of Jesus is kept, but His Son of God-ness is taken away. Like in these iconoclastic days, when you can have Jesus as long as He is the right kind of Jesus - as long as He is depicted as the right color, or nationality, or He teaches what I want Him to teach, or agrees with my way of thinking, or isn't too exclusive. And this is not just a problem for "them, out there," you know, the unbelievers. How easy it is

for us, too, to ignore those parts of Scripture we don't like. To hold onto our sins, to continue in them and not confess them and stop them. To make Jesus into how WE want Him to be. Satan is the master of a million tricks and will use them all on you. Count on it.

So that you're here today, confessing with Simon today, really is a miracle. Not something that you can take credit for, but the work of God in you, too. Jesus building His Church.

Which He does through the Office of the Keys. That's what Jesus said to Simon, playing with Simon's new name, Peter. ***And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*** And then Jesus tells him how: ***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***.

So Simon *the Peter*, along with the others who confess Jesus *the Christ*, will, by this *petering*, by this confessing, bind and loose. And just as their *petering*, the confessing of the apostles, was not something they did, but a miracle, the work of God in them, so too will be the *petering*, the confessing, of others be not because of them, but the work of God through His Word which the apostles will speak. As they speak the **Law** of God, binding and uncovering and exposing sin and unbelief. And as they speak the **Gospel**, as they speak Jesus, loosing and forgiving that sin. The disease is diagnosed, the medicine is applied, and *peters*, confessors, are created.

Which is what happened to you. **To you** the Christ was *petered*, confessed, and now **from you** the Christ is *petered*, confessed. Or maybe we could say *re-peted*! You speak what was spoken to you. Give what has been given to you. And as Jesus has been spoken to you, poured out on you, and fed to you, He has worked in your heart, that you believe and confess His name. And with that name, not even the gates of hell hold any fear for you. For with that name, *your* name is written in the book of life.

Now at the end of the reading today, Jesus tells the twelve ***not to tell anyone that He is the Christ***. Not yet, anyway. They haven't yet been sent to do so. And Jesus is still on His way to the cross. For it is there that He needs to be seen as the Christ - not in His miracles. Not in the Feeding of the 5,000, not in walking on the water, not in expelling demons, nor in any other miracle - but on the cross. Miracles are great, but they cannot save. Only the one on the cross can do that. Only the one who dies and rises can do that. Only the one who says "Father, forgive them" can do that. And so Jesus will. He will be the Christ, there. And we are *peters* when we see and confess Him there. And then we have a name that will live forever, for we have *His* name, given to us.

And that name we then *peter*, confess, not only with our lips, but with our lives. ***Living***

sacrifices, is how Paul put it. Not just speaking, but living, our confession. Living in forgiveness by forgiving others. Living as if we really believe that death cannot end our life. Living in the confidence that the gates of hell hold no power over us. Living in the knowledge that the name we bear is greater than anything this world can give us. And living in the freedom that all that brings. That come what may, while you and your name may be nothing in the eyes of the world, you are precious in the sight of God.

And that's all in the name you bear and confess.

So what's in a name? Well, everything! When that name is Jesus.

So as you *petered* Him in the Creed, and as you *peter* Him in your lives, so now *peter* Him as you come to His table. For as the apostle Paul told us, *as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes* (1 Corinthians 11:26). His death for you. His death for the world. That His Name live on *for the <u>life</u> of the world*.

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.