

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"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).

In this season of Epiphany, we celebrate the revelation of Jesus to the world as God's only Son, and our only Savior from the power of sin, death, and the devil. But today, in particular, we celebrate the confession of St. Peter, which is not really about Peter, but about his confession.

To His apostles, Jesus asked, ***"But who do you say that I am?"*** (Mark 8:29a). And this has been the question put to every person ever since. Who is Jesus?

Peter and the other apostles had seen Jesus do ordinary things. They saw Him eat and drink, grow tired and sleep, tell stories, and even pray. But they'd also seen Him do things that no other human being could *ever* do. They saw Jesus walk on water as though it were dry land! They saw Jesus command the winds and they obeyed! They saw Jesus multiply five loaves of bread and two fish to feed the vast multitudes. They heard Jesus speak words of truth that cut to the heart like no one ever could. Who is Jesus?

On that day in Caesarea Philippi, Peter spoke up for the Twelve and for all Christians of all ages saying, ***"You are the Christ!"*** (Mark 8:29b).

What Peter is saying on the behalf of the other apostles is that Jesus is the One for whom they and all of Israel have long waited. He is saying, ***"Jesus, You are the promised King of Israel from David's line. Jesus, You are one of us, yet, You are so much more. Jesus, You are the Son of the living God!"***

That is a great confession! Then Jesus says, ***"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood had not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven"*** (Matthew 16:17).

This confession was a real turning point in Christ's ministry. This great confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi is certainly worth remembering. But could there be a greater confession?

In our First Reading this morning from Acts 4, this same Peter speaks another confession as he and John stand before the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews and boldly speaks: ***“Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by Him”*** (Acts 4:10) we healed a lame man. This time, Peter's life is on the line. Yes, his confession at Caesarea Philippi was certainly a great confession, but could this confession before the Sanhedrin be a greater confession?

Certainly, Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi took divine insight, but it didn't take much courage. It didn't take much courage to confess in front of Jesus and the others. To tell Jesus that He was the Christ was more like the “Sunday School answer.” Peter, then, had nothing to fear. But Peter, now, has much to fear. This confession to the Sanhedrin could mean his life is cut short.

And Peter doesn't stop here, He continues with an even greater confession saying, ***“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven among men by which we must be saved”*** (Acts 4:12). Such courage!

In our collect for today, we prayed: *“Heavenly Father, You revealed to the apostle Peter the blessed truth that Your Son Jesus is the Christ. Strengthen us by the proclamation of this truth that we too may joyfully confess that there is salvation in no one else.”* This prayer is also a confession.

But do we always joyfully confess that there is salvation in no one else but Jesus? This is easy for us to confess on a Sunday morning or Monday evening here in the friendly confines of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, but what about out there? We are like Peter at Caesarea Philippi in here. But what is it like out there?

It certainly takes more courage to confess Jesus as the Christ out there, especially when the world is practically pagan. Many places of work openly mock Jesus. Many places of education openly mock Jesus.

What about to your non-Christian friends or family? Do you joyfully confess Christ to them?

It certainly takes more courage than Peter at Caesarea Philippi for us to say to our non-believing friends and family that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

So, was Peter's confession before the Sanhedrin his greater confession?

Certainly, Peter's confession before the Sanhedrin was great – and it was indeed braver, because it could have cost him his life.

But in the end, it was no greater than his confession at Caesarea Philippi. They are both great and greater as both confessions confessed Jesus to be the Christ.

Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi was great because Jesus is the suffering Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter's confession before the Sanhedrin was great because Jesus, who was crucified, raised and ascended, saves us.

You see, both of Peter's confessions were great, because Jesus is great.

So, no matter how you confess Jesus to your family or friends to help them understand His truth more fully, you are making a great confession.

But there is no greater confession than the one that so many of us made without even saying a word – it was when the Holy Spirit brought us to confess the triune God through our Baptism. This morning, Bella, though with words, made that great confession as the Holy Spirit brought her to the waters of Holy Baptism.

And we also make a great confession each time we, among our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ meet at the Communion rail to receive Christ's Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins as we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again.

As we confess Jesus to be the Christ, this is the confession Christ Himself uses to build His Church. You see, those gates of hell do not stand a chance against *this* confession. Through this confession, the Holy Spirit still calls and gathers, enlightens and sanctifies believers. And through it, Jesus binds hearts to Him and builds up His Church as the very temple of God upon earth.

Today, is not only the day we remember St. Peter's great confessions, as today is also Sanctity of Life Sunday. As fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, we not only confess Jesus as our Redeemer, but we also confess Jesus as our Creator. We confess with the Psalmist: ***"I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it well"*** (Psalm 139:13-14).

Every single human being, from the least to the greatest, was carefully handmade by God. He planned our all our days even before He skillfully knit us together in our mother's wombs. So, we confess that all life is precious from conception to natural death. We confess that all lives have value. We confess that Jesus purchased all lives – *those born and unborn* – ***"with a price"*** (1 Corinthians 6:20), which was His holy precious blood. Jesus bore the shame of the cross to grant us peace with God.

For ***"if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved"*** (Romans 10:9-10).

So, let us all joyfully confess Jesus to be the Christ, the Creator and Redeemer, the Savior of the world! Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +