

Many members. One body united in Christ.

The Festival of the Confession of St. Peter
St. Mark 8:27-9:1
18 January, AD 2026

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

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

This is THE question that gets to the heart of it all. Who do you say that I am? The right confession is filled with life and peace and salvation. The wrong confession is fraught with doubt and despair and, finally, eternal death. The answer from "the people" isn't surprising. Jesus is certainly significant. He is a great, powerful, and wise man. He preaches with authority. The miracles certainly suggest that God is with Him. But let's not get ahead of ourselves and say that He's the One. It seems a little over-zealous to assert that He is the promised Messiah sent from God. Look at Him! There really isn't much there. You can't expect us to believe that He is a mighty deliverer. What could someone like Jesus possibly deliver us from?

But Peter got it! "You are the Christ!" That's pretty straight forward. "You are the Anointed One, Jesus. You have been sent by God. You are the Seed of the woman who will crush Satan's head and vanquish death. You are the Son of David who will sit on his throne forever." St. Matthew even tells us that Peter identified Jesus as the Son of the Living God. Peter confesses that Jesus is, in fact, not just another sinner prophet, but God incarnate. Sense and experience would suggest otherwise. Reason and logic can't tell us this. It must be revealed to us by the Father. How can such an unimpressive man born of flesh and blood, whose father and mother we know, be the God who called all that is into existence? By the grace of the Holy Spirit, Peter was given to see beyond what his eyes and mind could perceive. He believed that Jesus was God incarnate, the Word made flesh.

It is quite common in our day, since there really isn't any debate about whether or not Jesus existed, to acknowledge that Jesus was a wise and good man, worthy of imitating, and who had a lot of good things to say. Muslims and Jews both acknowledge that Jesus was real. Muslim's will even afford Him the honor of being a prophet. Jews, obviously, hold Him to be a false prophet and a blasphemer. But such people stalwartly deny that Jesus was either divine, God of God and Light of Light, or the Messiah. And, tragically, all who in this way reject Jesus, who relegate Him to such insignificance and refuse to believe with their hearts and confess with their lips that He is the Son of God incarnate who has born the guilt of the

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world's sin, will find themselves rejected by Him on the Last Day when He returns again in power and glory on the Last Day.

And there are also many in our day who would have no problem agreeing with Jesus' divinity. "Yes, Jesus is an awesome God and can do marvelous things for me! He can work miracles for me and make me happy!" This is the Jesus everyone is fine with. This is the Jesus we want to tell our friends and neighbors about. He can make everything better. He can make sad people happy. He can make sick people well. He can make poor people rich. That's the kind of Jesus we can all get behind.

But is that really who Jesus is? Is that why the Son of the Living God became a man, so that you could have a smooth, happy, problem-free life, so that you could feel good about yourself? Just ask St. Peter. One minute he is declared blessed because of his true and bold confession and the next Jesus looks at him and rebukes him - "Get behind me Satan, because you aren't thinking about the things of God, but the things of men." Peter had very different ideas about what being the Christ meant. It was an appalling suggestion in his mind that the Christ should suffer and die. "That's not necessary, Jesus. There is an easier, better way. Peter, like you and I so often do, took Satan's deal that Jesus had fiercely rejected. Peter thought he knew how Jesus could really make His power and influence reach further. Peter thought he knew a better way to grow the church that didn't involve suffering and dying.

The things of God and the things of men couldn't be more contrary. You see, while you and I are thinking about how to avoid even the slightest worldly discomfort, how to have the life and things we've always wanted - the right friends, the lucrative job, the most attended programs, enough savings, the best grades, the most serious coaches, the biggest church with the overflowing offering plate - Jesus was willingly and gladly embracing the rejection of the world, the hatred and betrayal of His friends, the cursing and blasphemy of those who loved money and the praises of men. While we are constantly trying to wiggle out from under our crosses, Jesus was relentlessly pursuing His to save you. He set His face toward Jerusalem, enduring the cross and despising its shame.

This is a Jesus we aren't quite as comfortable with. We stand in the way of the Jesus who, like a lamb before the shearers, silently endured the scourges that ripped His flesh to shreds, who would reach out His pierced hand and proclaim your sins forgiven, who would give you the peace of His death and resurrection rather than a to-do list. We stand in the way of the real Jesus when we desperately cling to our innocence and our facades of a polished, put-together life that at most needs just a

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little pick-me-up or spit shine. These thoughts and delusions reveal that the devil is still nearby, whispering his lies and our sinful flesh is all too eager to buy in. We want to be disciples without taking up our cross and we imagine that we are smart enough to figure out we can have it all - the things of God and the things of men. We think we can confess Christ without putting our flesh to death. But we cannot confess Christ and hold our grudges, withhold our offerings, despise authority, fill our eyes and hearts and those of our children with the filth and lawless living of the world, not pray, not read and learn the Bible, not gather with the body of Christ to receive the preaching of His Word and partake of His Body and Blood, not concern ourselves with the burdens and needs of all those in our congregation. These are the crosses that are intrinsic to the life of the Christian because they are how our sinful flesh is controlled and disciplined and held in check.

Do not be deceived by the things of this world that are all passing away. Even if you had all of them, you would have nothing. There is only one Christ, one Savior, one sinless Son of the Living God whose cross and resurrection have delivered you from the damnation of your sins. You will only find this Christ veiled in weakness, suffering, trial, darkness, and persecution. Reason and wisdom and your desires must be cast into the garbage heap because they are all stained and clouded by sin and will only lead you astray. They can't see the real Jesus. They will try to seek God in your own glory, success, and happiness. They will despise the cross as weakness, unworthy of Jesus, an unfortunate ending to such a wonderful man. They will not find joy, comfort, and peace in your baptism. They will pass over the bread and wine as little more than symbolic gestures. They will look for Jesus everywhere except where He promises to be.

Creaturely comforts are not the assurance of God's love for you. Well-behaved kids and a picture-perfect marriage do not at all prove that God has blessed you. Nor is a busy congregation with the prettiest building and the biggest budget proof of faithfulness. By those measures, Christ, God's own Son, is an abject failure. He was rejected by most and hated by many, poor and homeless, abandoned in His darkest hour (even by bold Peter!), put to death in the most humiliating and excruciating way imaginable. Where there is the Word of God and faith, there will be crosses and weakness. Hence why Christians should not be surprised to find affliction in their lives and homes and congregations. When such trials arise let us first recognize that it is the devil at work and second be on guard lest we begin to despise our Christian brothers and sisters for their weaknesses and seek to be rid of them rather than be reconciled to them and draw nearer to them to help them as our Lord has done for us.

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There is nothing more beautiful or glorious or God-pleasing than the real Christ, the Son of Man and Son of God who had to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. This is the real Christ who does the real will of His heavenly Father. This is the Christ that welcomes and eats with sinners. This is the Christ that forgives adulterers, thieves, drug dealers, and terrorists. This is the Christ that does not turn away from you when your life is falling apart. He isn't ashamed of your frailty, your struggles, or your pain. This Christ doesn't snuff out smoldering wicks or break bruised reeds. This is the Christ who binds up broken hearts, who is quicker to forgive than we are to repent. This is the Christ who came in great weakness and humility so that we might be assured that He came for the likes of us - poor, lonely, hurting, doubting, heavy-laden sinners.

This Christ comes to you today with healing in His wings. He comes to bestow upon you a kingdom that is eternal, that is filled with a peace that no amount of money or good deeds or success or popularity will ever be able to give you. Jesus gives what He and He alone can and wants to give you - the full and free forgiveness of all your sins; the promise of God the Father's love; a kingdom where the God of all grace and mercy shines upon you and scatters the darkness of this present evil world. He gives you Himself, flesh and blood, veiled under bread and wine so that your heart and mind can rest in the absolute certainty that your crosses and those of your neighbor are not signs of failure or weak faith, but the loving, disciplining, guiding hand of our caring Father who would steer us clear of the traps of Satan and the dangers of this world. Jesus has taken all that is weak and broken in you and made it His own. He has gladly suffered all this so that again this day He can pour out to you life and peace and all the blessings of the cross He took up and overcame for you.

Jesus is the true Christ. He is the only Christ. So let us in thankfulness and joy take up our cross and follow Him in the way that leads to everlasting life. Let us with Peter and all the children of God confess Him boldly before kings and neighbors and coworkers and friends and lift up our voices in endless prayer and thanksgiving.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.