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Many of us can identify with Peter. He boldly proclaims his faith in Jesus. He says Jesus is the Christ. But then at other times not so much. At other times he cowers when he feels threatened, like when Jesus was on trial. In our Gospel reading today we see one of those times where Peter's faith shines. Let's take a look at this side of Peter.

Jesus presented a question to the disciples. **"Who do the people say that the Son of Man is?"** They knew there was something different about Him. When Jesus calmed the stormy seas and the disciples saw His power over creation, they wondered, **"who then is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"** Later when He walked on water, they ended up confessing that He is *truly the Son of God*.

And now Jesus is asking them two questions. He does this in a way to help them understand. First, **"who do the people say that I am?"** Well, the scribes and Pharisees knew of His teachings. They had heard of His works throughout the land. The people had witnessed miracles. The question was asked to the whole group, and they answer Him. Some people thought Jesus was John the Baptist returned and working through Jesus in some mysterious way. Others thought He might be Elijah returned, or Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets.

Then Jesus asked the disciples the second question, **"but who do you say that I am?"** This time Peter answered for the group, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** When Jesus speaks, He is intentional. He wasn't asking for the sake of curiosity. He asked them these two questions to help them make a confession here. Jesus wanted them to say He was *the Christ*.

They made the connection. Jesus isn't just some prophet. Don't get me wrong; prophets are great. They were given special gifts by God to discern various things, and many times, to predict future events. But Jesus isn't just some *mere prophet*. Jesus is *the Christ*. Jesus is the anointed one that the OT prophets spoke about!

Obviously this was the connection Jesus wanted the disciples to make. Jesus said to him, **"Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven."** Then Jesus gave him the name Peter, which means rock. And He said, **"On this rock I will build my church."**

Man, we would love to be *this* Peter. This Peter has things revealed to him. This Peter boldly confesses Jesus. But let's look at Peter from another angle. Before Jesus was crucified, Peter promised to follow Jesus wherever He went, into prison and even into death. That *still* sounds like the Peter we want to emulate. But then when Jesus is on trial, being beaten, being ridiculed, we see the other side of Peter. He is afraid of the reaction of the crowds.

But this is Peter! He's going to boldly confess Jesus as the Christ, isn't he? No. He denies Jesus three times because he is frightened by the crowd. We want to be like Peter who is bold in his confession. We don't want to be like this Peter, who denies Jesus. But sometimes we do.

The world today has many modern scribes and Pharisees. Not all of them are of the Jewish faith. Many people in the modern world acknowledge that Jesus existed. There is too much evidence for them to deny His existence. Accounts recorded both in the Bible and in other sources show that Jesus lived at the time the Bible tells us. But they treat Him as a great teacher, a community organizer, a moralist. They reject Him as the Christ who would fulfill what the prophets spoke about. And sometimes we are afraid of their reaction. So instead of boldly confessing Jesus as the Christ (like the Peter we love), we are tempted to stay silent, to cower in fear (like the Peter we don't love so much). And sometimes we give in to that temptation.

But Jesus, as the Christ, had a mission. When He was nailed to that cross, it wasn't an accidental circumstance. Jesus made a proactive decision. Before the foundation of the world, before our fall into sin, He was appointed to carry out the Father's will. He was born among us *so that* He could die on that cross.

The scribes and Pharisees thought their savior would be one who conquered with military might, who would defeat their enemies in the nations opposing them. But Jesus didn't come to conquer the rulers of this world yet. Our Anointed One came to conquer sin, and death, and the devil now. His signs and teachings gave us hints about who Jesus is. His death and His resurrection show us His mission as the Christ.

But we are like Peter in another way. Jesus did not condemn Peter even after Peter had sunk to his lowest and denied knowing Jesus three times. When Jesus died on the cross, He took away the guilt of that offense and all of Peter's other sins. When He was raised from death, He proved that He was who He said He was, and who the disciple confessed Him to be. And this forgiveness of sins is given to you too.

How do we know? Well, after Peter declared Jesus to be the Christ, Jesus promised them the keys of the kingdom of heaven and earth. He spoke about these keys again in Matthew 18. These keys open the gates of heaven and shut the gates of hell. These keys are used for binding or loosing sins. Jesus said in Matthew 28, **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."**

This is how we use these keys—as a church. You gather together in church and you worship your God who has forgiven you. Some days are special because you get to see a husband and wife stand up and walk to the front of the church, holding in their arms a little baby. The pastor stands up there with them and says some words—*God's words* entrusted to him. He scoops up some water and pours it on that little baby, baptizing him or her in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are the same words that were spoken when you were baptized. These are the same words that God used to reveal to you that Jesus is the Christ.

Some days are special because you have an opportunity to stand together and confess your sins, bearing witness to each other that you need a Savior. Then your pastor uses the keys entrusted to him and gives you God's own forgiveness, assuring you that you, like Peter, do have a Savior, that you are really forgiven as he speaks those words and as he makes the sign of the cross over you.

Some days are special because you stand here together and confess your common Christian faith in the words of one of our creeds. You stand together as God's people and confess "I believe in God the Father almighty." "I believe in the Holy Spirit." And in the middle, like Peter, you confess "I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Some days are special because you come to the front of the church and gather at the Lord's Altar to receive the body and blood of Jesus, the Christ. You hear wonderful words of comfort, "Take. Eat. This is my body given for you." "Take. Drink. This is my blood shed for you." Why? "For the forgiveness of sins."

Other days are special too. Even when you aren't in the church building, you still function as Christ's church whenever you hold to the confession of Jesus as the Christ, the foundation of your faith. When you gather together at the dinner table and pray to God, you aren't only giving thanks and asking for His blessing. You are confessing to yourself, to your family and friends, to those at neighboring tables in a restaurant, that your hopes for all of life's need are found in Jesus.

When you hear someone in the world say that Jesus was a good man, a good teacher, and you agree, but are bold enough to say, "Yes, He was a good teacher, but He IS so much more. Let me tell you what I know about Him," it is also a special day. It is a special day because you can be like the good Peter, the Peter we love. You can speak of the Christ on the cross. You can speak about the Jesus who rose from the dead. You can speak about the forgiveness of sins that is found in this Christ, this Son of the Living God.

I remember reading a particular Lutheran Hour devotion a few years ago. It was about a British pastor a long time ago. This pastor had convinced a skeptical, unbelieving friend of his to come to church several Sundays to hear his sermons. After several weeks, the friend came up to the pastor and said that he believed. The pastor asked him which sermon it was that finally reached him. But the friend's answer wasn't what he was expecting.

The friend said that his sermons were good, but it wasn't in church that the Word reached him. One cold winter day he was helping an old woman across the street. She looked at him and said "I wonder sir, if you know my Savior, Jesus Christ. He is everything in the world to me. I would like you to know Him too." It was the joy he saw on her face combined with her sincere confession of faith that finally reached him.

You are the church that Christ spoke of. Whenever two or three are gathered in His name, He promises to be in the midst of them. When you carry out your vocation as a Christian, always be ready to give the reason for the hope and the joy that is in you, so that you can boldly confess Jesus as the Christ, the rock of our salvation. Christ died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Whenever you confess this faith, you join Peter and the apostles, and the Church throughout the world in saying, "In Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." Amen.