

# St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Fifth Sunday after Pentecost ✠

July 1, 2007

*Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe*

“Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”<sup>19</sup> They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”<sup>20</sup> “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”<sup>21</sup> Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.<sup>22</sup> And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”<sup>23</sup> Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.<sup>24</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

Luke 9:18-24

I sometimes joke with people that I don't really have a first name anymore. I say that because very few people call me by my first name. At home I'm Dad and at church I'm Pastor. Those have sort of become my names.

But many people are known and called by their titles. Doctors are usually called, “doctor.” Teachers usually by Mr., Mrs, or Miss, or if you go into a preschool classroom, you might even hear one of the kids call out, “teacher, teacher.” They don't even always get a last name.; just “teacher.”

Now whether people do that out of respect, or just because it's easier to re, what does it mean when you call someone by their title? Doesn't it in one way or another call attention to their job? Doesn't it acknowledge the position they have and more importantly, the work they do?

In the Gospel for today, Peter called Jesus by his title. He called him the Christ. When he did, he was confessing the truth about who Jesus is and what his job was. You also confess Jesus Christ. You do that, for example, when you confess your faith, much like you did just moments ago in the Nicene Creed. So since... let's sit with Peter and the disciples for a moment and listen to what Jesus tells us when we confess Jesus Christ. He wants us to know what that meant for him. And he wants us to know what that means for us.

Today we find Jesus in what seems to be one of his favorite places, alone with his disciples, praying. **Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”** When people hear about something new, something potentially amazing and wonderful, they talk about it. And if they don't know much about it, they speculate. Just think of the buzz and media attention that was given to the iPhone this past week. Some said “Gotta have it” and waited in line for days. Others said, “What's the big deal?” But the point is, people were talking about it.

People were also talking about Jesus. They had seen things or heard things. But they generally didn't know what to make of it, so they speculated. Perhaps they said something like, “He talks about God as if he knows him and speaks with him. He must be some kind of prophet. He speaks about heaven as if had been there and about time as if it meant nothing to him. Perhaps he has come back from the dead.”

Then Jesus says to his disciples, “Your turn. You know what people are saying. What do you think? What is *your* confession about me? Am I what everyone else thinks? Or am I whatever they want me to be? Who do you say I am?”

All the *other* answers were wrong. But Peter speaks up for the group and answers, “**The Christ of God.**” Jesus is not just a prophet (even one who has come back from the dead). He’s not just a great teacher, stellar role model, wise philosopher, or even an all-around nice guy. He’s so much more than that. He’s the Christ.

But Jesus doesn’t just leave it there. He wants Peter and us to correctly and fully understand what it means that Jesus is the Christ. The title *Christ* is from the Greek word that means the same thing as the Hebrew word *Messiah*. It means the anointed one, the chosen one. Jesus is the chosen, promised Messiah. He’s the one whom the prophets foretold. So to confess Jesus as the Christ is to know what that meant for him, to know what Scripture says about him. And Jesus tells us: “**The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**”

If Jesus is the Christ, if he is the Savior promised in the Old Testament, then he will do what the Old Testament says he will do. He’s going to be rejected and despised by men (as Isaiah foretold) and forsaken by his God (like we sang in the Psalm). He’s going to be beaten and killed by soldiers, stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

If Jesus is the Christ, then he will come humbly and gently, then he will appear weak and lowly, then he will suffer and die shamefully, just as Scripture says. That means he’s not going to be an earthly success. He’s not going to reunite the nation of Israel, nor will he end war or poverty or hatred. Instead, he’s going to live among sinners and die for sinners. Instead, he’s going to quietly take the place of sinners without their asking and without their help.

That’s partly why Jesus didn’t want them to go blabbing this news through the hills of Galilee. Because Jesus is the Christ, he’s going to get this job done and he doesn’t need anyone to speed up the process or (even worse) to try to prevent it. So he says, “Don’t tell anyone – yet.

A time was coming when Jesus would call on his disciples to tell the world what he said and who he is and what he has done. Now Peter confessed in this small group gathered in the hills. But someday, all his disciples would be called to confess Jesus as Christ from the mountaintops. But when they do (when we do) we need to remember the same thing Jesus reminded them here.

Jesus had to suffer, die, and rise. That’s what it means to confess Jesus as Christ. It means that we confess that Jesus was rejected and killed by the most church-going and religious people of his day. If the elders, the priests, and the scribes could fall into such a sin as to reject Jesus, what does that say about the natural state of our hearts? They’re no better. If some of Jesus’ own disciples thought that maybe Jesus would become so powerful that they would get a slice of the power and prestige when he began his reign – should I be surprised if my sinful heart wants some other kind of Jesus, if I too would prefer that Jesus make this life a little better for me than to just promise me good things to come? The Christ we confess came to suffer, to die, at the hands of people like us. But the Christ we confess also died save people like us and then rose from the dead to prove to people like us that he does have power over sin, and someday, he’ll demonstrate his power over death by raising our mortal bodies.

Jesus reminds us here to confess Christ knowing what it meant for him, and therefore to know what his suffering, death, and resurrection mean for us.

What does it mean for us that Jesus is the Christ? Jesus continues, “**If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.**”

If you confess Jesus as the Christ, you confess that he went to the cross for you. You confess that by his death on the cross, he gave you eternal life. But here's the rub. If you confess, "Jesus is the Christ" – If you do that truthfully and fully and accurately, you're going to be contradicting the confession of a whole lot of people.

Now, I don't know of anyone who is currently saying that Jesus is John the Baptist or a resurrected prophet. But there sure are a lot of people who consider him a dead prophet. There sure are a lot of people who consider the words of this Jesus and his followers to be a whole bunch of fiction. And it probably won't win you many friends when you tell them that this Christ suffered the hell they deserve but because they reject this Christ, they're going to hell anyway, whether they believe in it or not.

And there are a whole bunch of people in our world that do recognize Jesus and do consider him something special. But they still do not confess him as the Christ of Scripture. One person might say that Jesus merely tells us and shows us how to live a good life. Another person might say that Jesus is more like a good buddy, who doesn't want to talk about downers like sin and guilt. No, he wants you to have fun, be yourself, do what feels good. But that's not the Christ of Scripture.

Confessing Jesus Christ means *truthfully* confessing who Jesus is according to Scripture, but it also means knowing what that means for us. For Jesus, being the Christ led to the cross. For us, confessing him also leads to a cross. It may lead to awkward moments or emotional conflicts. It may lead to family strife or personal loss. It could even lead to the loss of our own life.

But here is the comfort in our confession. **"For whoever want to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."** The result of confessing Christ – even under the cross – always leads to life. No matter what cross we bear, no matter how hard or heavy it may be, every Christian cross always follows Christ's cross. If we suffer for Christ's name, we follow the Christ who suffered for us. If we die for confessing Christ, we will die following him who died for us. But here's the key: if we die for Christ, we follow a Christ who is not dead, but alive, and so no matter what cross we bear, we always follow him to life eternal.

You know, I don't really mind not hearing my first name that often. I'm perfectly content to be called "Daddy" at home because I love being that. I'm just as content to be called "pastor" because that's also what I live to be and love to be.

I don't think Jesus minds it at all when we call him by his title, either. In fact, I think he loves it when we confess with Peter, **"You are the Christ of God."** But when we do, I believe it's absolutely vital that we remember who we're confessing. We're confessing the promised Savior who came to suffer and die for all sin. Christ, have mercy on us. And he does. We're confessing the one who rose from the dead according to the Scriptures – to assure us that resurrection always follows the cross. Praise be to you, O Christ. So we pray,

O Lord, let this your little flock, Your name alone confessing,  
Continue in your loving care, True unity possessing.  
Your sacraments, O Lord, And your saving Word  
To us e'er pure retain. Grant that they may remain  
Our only strength and comfort.

And for your gospel let us dare to sacrifice all treasure;  
Teach us to bear your blessed cross, To find in you all pleasure.  
Oh, grant us steadfastness In joy and distress  
Lord, for your mercy's sake Let us by grace partake  
Of endless joy and glory.