

September 18, 2011
Pentecost 14

"Built on Christ Alone"

MATTHEW 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

This past summer my wife and I attended the WELS Worship Conference in St. Peter, Minnesota. On Wednesday of the conference we traveled to Martin Luther College in New Ulm where we attended workshops and worshipped with over 1000 other people in the new Chapel of the Christ. What an exalting and uplifting that experience was. It was a foretaste of the worship that is waiting for us someday around the throne of the Lamb. This beautiful new chapel is not called the Chapel of Christ, but the Chapel of the Christ.

Do you know what the name "Christ" means? It means "anointed one." The heavenly Father anointed Jesus at his Baptism with the Holy Spirit to be the one to rescue us from our sins and save us. There is no other person, no other god, or no other religion in the world that our Father has chosen to do this work for us. When Jesus asked his disciples what they believed about him, Peter said, "You are the Christ the Son of the Living God." He confessed Jesus as the Christ.

Let me share with you a story about something that happened this past week to illustrate how much we need to have God's chosen One, the Christ to save us. Maybe you heard about the 21 year old man who crashed his motorcycle. He was pinned underneath a large BMW sedan. He had only seconds to live as the car burst into flames. A person in a nearby building captured the scene on a cell phone as people ran to the accident site, joined together to lift the car and pull the man to safety. In the light of eternity we have only seconds to live our lives on this earth. There is only One who can rescue us from eternal punishment and save us from the flaming fires of hell. That person is Jesus, God's Son, the Christ your only hope and my only hope of being saved.

It is a blessing for you to build your life on Christ

What an amazing miracle of God's grace it is that you are able to confess this belief in Christ as the only one who can save you! Not everyone believes this. Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Jesus often referred to himself as the Son of Man to emphasize that he was fully human and that he had come to this earth

to give us life to rescue us. He once said, "The Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost." Jesus also spoke of himself as God's only begotten Son.

What was the buzz about Jesus? The disciples heard people talking about Jesus. "They replied, 'Some say, John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'" Because of his preaching some thought Jesus could be John the Baptist who had come back to life again in the body of Jesus. Some thought he was one of the prophets such as Elijah because of the miracles that he had performed or the great prophet Jeremiah because of his powerful preaching. It is interesting to note that Jesus asked this question in Caesarea Philippi where a temple had been built by the Seleucids to the god Pan and another temple built by Herod and dedicated to the great Caesar Augustus.

What's the buzz about Jesus today? A billion Muslims will confess that Jesus is a great prophet who performed miracles and had a lot of good things to say, but they will not confess that he is God or that he died on the cross for their sins. Albert Schweitzer wrote a book called, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus" implying that there is a real Jesus who exists behind the myths and miracles in the gospel accounts. In his book, "Born Again" Charles Colson tells about believing Jesus was a great teacher, a valuable asset to or society, but he did not believe Jesus was Lord and God until he started examining the claims that Jesus made for himself in the Bible.

What do you believe about Jesus Christ? That is the most important question in life. Jesus asked his disciples, "But what about you? Who do you say that I am?" Peter immediately jumps in to provide an answer, like the student who wants to answer the question first. "You are the Christ the Son of the living God." Peter knew Jesus was the Christ. He heard how the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus in his baptism and anointed him thus proving to the world Jesus was the only one to save us. Later Peter would boldly confess to his fellow Jews these words about Jesus, "You know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power." In his second letter he wrote, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

What do you believe about Jesus Christ? Oh, dear Christian you are so blessed to believe that Jesus is Lord and God from all eternity and that he is "the Christ" the One the Father has chosen to save you. Jesus is the Christ, he is the one who will do the job of saving you and he will do it perfectly. If I have problems with my heart and the blood is not flowing to the important arteries veins that feed the heart muscle, I would be a fool to call a plumber to clean out the clogged veins and arteries. I am born into this world making all the wrong choices about being saved. I am programmed by my sinful nature to believe what one man recently said on the radio. He told his audience that he had some fears about dying but then he had a priceless moment where he opened a Chinese fortune cookie and found the words, "Your virtues will outweigh your faults." He used this to bolster his confidence in believing he could stand before God and make the final grade because his virtues would outweigh his faults. After Oprah Winfrey had her last show in May a reporter asked the question, "To whom will Oprah turn now that she is leaving the talk circuit?" "Will she turn to God," the reporter asked." Then she opined, "Not likely. Many Americans no longer believe in a mighty judge who sets the rules for life now and forever. Instead, many of us sing Oprah's song of self-redemption."

I would be a fool to think I could perform an emergency appendectomy on myself, and even a great fool to think I can do anything to remove even the smallest sin by the most virtuous life in the world. I need a Savior, you need a Savior. We need the one God the Father has anointed by his Holy Spirit, Jesus, God's Son, the Christ. Jesus spoke so clearly, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus tells Peter that this rock-solid confession of faith did not well up from within him. It was given to him as a blessing from the Heavenly Father. "Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but my Father in heaven." A better more literal translation says, "Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven." There is nothing in your flesh, your DNA, your hormones, your brain cells, your feelings, your nice features that led you or me to confess Jesus as our Lord and God. This comes from God. This comes from the Holy Spirit. Faith and confession are a blessing from God. It says of Lydia in Acts 16, "The Lord opened her heart to believe." What you have this morning, this precious gift of faith in Jesus as the Christ the Son of the living God is gift given to you by your heavenly Father. John 1:13 says that we are children, "born not of natural descent, not of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

It is a blessing to bring this blessing to others

There is only one reason the Lord leaves us live here on this earth and that is to lead other people to have the same confession of faith that we have. Jesus told Peter and the other disciples, "And I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Peter's given name was Simon. Jesus changed his name to Peter. Peter means rock. He was given this name because of his faith and confession in Jesus as the solid rock of his faith and hope. Jesus promises to build his church on this rock. This rock is not Peter but the rock of Peter's faith which is Jesus. We often sing of this rock solid faith with the words, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me. Let me hide myself in Thee." The Christian Church is not built on Peter, it is built on the place where Peter put his faith, Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Because we are built on Christ the gates of hell cannot overcome us. Revelation 12 shows us the power of Satan to afflict the church. It even says that Satan has the power to accuse us day and night before God's throne. There is an awful lot of bad stuff Satan can dredge up against you and me from the way we lived our lives this past week. His legal pad of accusations has notes on both sides. Here is the good news. "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony." One of the favorite words or verses that you have in your arsenal are the words, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." You sing, "Rock of Ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee. Let the water and the blood, From Thy river side which flowed. Be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power."

As long as this world stands Jesus will be using people like Peter and you and me to help people build their lives on Jesus. "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." In an age when everyone is making up their own rules on what is right and wrong and acceptable to God, the Holy Christian church has the task of binding

sins to people. We tie sins to people. We remind them of what God expects of them here in the Bible. We show the shameful consequences. We point out the wrath of God that must pour itself out on all sin. I recall hearing a Billy Graham sermon where he looked into the camera, stuck out his boney finger and shouted, "Your sin will find you out." People need to know the truth so they cry out to the Lord as David did in Psalm 51, "Have mercy on me O God..." And then we have the privilege of leading people to Jesus to show them that everything in their lives that cries out for punishment from God has been forgiven by Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God." We have the keys of the kingdom of heaven. We have God's Word to lead people to confess their hope in Jesus as Peter did and we do. We want everyone in the world to join us in confessing with Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Amen.