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The Confession of St. Peter

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Revelation and Confession”

Text: Matthew 16:13-19

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

When Christ is revealed, there is confession. Confession of Christ cannot take place apart from revelation. The two always go together. And so in the Holy Gospel, Christ was revealed to Peter by the Father, and Peter confesses. Jesus asks, “*Who do you say that I am?*” and Peter replies, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” That pattern of revelation and confession is what makes this text an Epiphany text. And this pattern of revelation and confession is the rock on which Christ builds His Church. For in, with, and under the Church, the Father reveals Christ to us, and we confess.

And that revelation must first take place is inherent in the definition of the word *confess*. For the word confess doesn’t simply mean to admit you’re wrong – it literally means *to say the same thing*. And so the Church, in confessing, speaks back to God what He has spoken to us. *We say the same thing* – for what He says is sure and true. And so we hear His Word, and as we believe, we speak. We confess who **He** is, as He has told us, in the Creed. We confess who we are, as **He** has told us, in the confession of sin. We confess **His salvation**, as He has told us, in the liturgy, in our songs and hymns of praise, and in receiving His gifts in Holy Communion.

And all of this comes from God. Peter doesn’t get credit from Jesus for coming up with the correct answer! Jesus instead states that this answer didn’t come from within Peter at all, but from outside of Him. It was revealed to Him. . . . And so it must be in the Church. We do not believe what we choose to believe. We do not speak what we want to speak. We do not change what we want to change. Our confession doesn’t come from within us, but from outside of us. **And that revelation enables our confession.** If we were speaking just our own opinions, or thoughts, or wisdom, you should rightly be afraid to speak! If I had to stand up here and preach from myself, my thoughts or cleverness or what I think, why would you come here at all!?! . . . But we do not. The truth is revealed to us by God in His Word, and like Peter, we confess. *We say the same thing*. We cannot do otherwise.

But we are tempted to do otherwise, aren't we? Tempted to not say the same thing. Tempted to not speak at all and to remain silent. Tempted to doubt and mistrust what God has told us in His Word; that what He has told us is *not* so sure and true; that perhaps there are other ways, different ways, better ways. . . . And those are great temptations because our confession is being attacked from many directions these days, and quite frankly, it is easier not to confess, isn't it? To just keep our mouths shut and not cause trouble. . . . And so when the JW or the Mormon shows up at your door, we're too busy. When someone you're talking to says that all religions are really the same and everyone will be saved, we change the subject. Or when one of the hot-button issues of our day comes up, like homosexuality, or this week especially the sanctity of life, we just "live and let live."

But with our silence, what are we doing? *Who are we helping?* . . . The Lutheran theologian Herman Sasse observed that lies against the truth do not become established overnight. First, when they are introduced, they seek only to be tolerated. Once that is achieved, however, the next step for the lie is equality with the truth – equal validity. And when that is accomplished, the lie, *emboldened*, seeks to become the truth, and to extinguish the truth. . . . And if you think about it, it is not hard to see this very pattern in our world today, attacking the truth of God's Word.

And so God has given us His Word and His truth. He has sent His Spirit of truth into your heart to sustain and strengthen you. Because He knows that on our own, we can do nothing. On our own, we are too weak and afraid. On our own, we are too easily led astray by the so-called wisdom of this world. And so when it comes to matters of the truth, matters of life and death, we get the right answers not from within ourselves, but from Heaven. "***Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven.***" And this truth not only informs us, but enables us to confess. To confess before those who deny the truth, as we heard Peter do in the first reading from Acts. To confess before those who are doubting the truth, as we heard Peter do in the second reading from First Peter. To confess before all, because we are not simply speaking what is from ourselves, but the very truth and Word of God from Heaven. Christ is revealed, and we confess.

Now, you think that would be enough, that our Lord reveals Himself to us, and gives us His Spirit, and gives us faith, and enables us to believe – but our Lord always gives more than we ask or think, and He gives in abundance. And so after Peter's confession, and along with this confession, Christ gives even more. He makes four promises. Four promises that are connected with this confession of Christ and His work for us. Four promises that we need to focus on, and remember, and cling to.

And the **first** promise from Christ in response to Peter's confession is one of blessing. ***"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!"*** As we confess Christ, we are blessed. Now that doesn't mean blessing as the world necessarily thinks of blessing, because many people in this world receive worldly riches and honor and privilege quite apart from confessing Christ! No, Christ is here speaking of blessings that come in no other way, and from no other confession. These are eternal blessings. Blessings that cannot be taken away. Blessings that for now may not be able to be seen, but are a matter of faith. Peter received these blessings, even though he faced many hardships, and had many ups and downs, and doubts and difficulties, and even suffered martyrdom! And they are yours as well. Blessed are you in confessing Christ, despite what you may seem or feel. Blessed are you, for you are sons and daughters of God, receiving from Him what only He can give.

The **second** promise of Christ in connection with this confession of faith is that ***"on this rock I will build my church."*** We have His promise that as we confess, as we proclaim His Name and His work, He is building His Church. Apart from this confession we may be building something, but it is not the Church. With this confession, Christ is active and building. And again, that is a matter of faith, because we may not see it, we may wonder if its true, we may think that we have to do something else, something in addition, something exciting or novel! But no. Christ builds His Church. He is the rock and foundation, and there is no other.

The **third** promise Christ gives with this confession is that ***"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*** And while this is a wonderful promise . . . be honest – you're not really all that concerned with the gates of hell, are you? There's much more to be afraid of and concerned about just trying to live in this world, isn't there? The gates of hell? Don't they seem so far away, so distant, in both time and place? . . . But are they? Or are they perhaps closer than we think? The gates of hell surrounding us in the temptations of the devil to deny Christ in word and deed; to mistrust; to doubt; to turn away from our confession and walk through one of those gates? . . . But against this confession of Christ, and the Church that He is building with it, the gates of hell are helpless! The gates of hell cannot prevail. We have the promise of God's protection – not only against the people and things of this world that frighten us, but also against Satan himself.

And then **finally**, last but certainly not least, with the confession of Christ comes His promise of forgiveness. ***"I will give you the keys to 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."*** Forgiveness for our failures. Forgiveness for our silence when we should have spoken. Forgiveness for our sin-filled thoughts and words and

deeds and desires. Forgiveness through the Christ whom we confess – the only-begotten Son of God who came down from Heaven, in order to ascend the cross and pay the price for our sins. Forgiveness that we need not be plagued by doubt or worry or fear about how God looks at us, or if He loves us or not. The cross proves that He does. And Jesus' empty tomb proves that that love is not dead, but alive, and that Jesus' promises of blessing, building, protection, and forgiveness are not dead, but are alive and given to you.

And with the revelation of such great and precious promises, given to us by Christ our Saviour, we confess. We say the same thing. We acknowledge Him and His grace and goodness toward us. Grace and goodness that we in no way deserve. And we rejoice to do so, knowing that while our confession may not be welcomed by many in this world, it is needed by so many. So many – like us – who need to hear that there is a God and Saviour who loves them, who died for them, and who does not want to throw them away or get rid of them, but wants to adopt them into His family.

And to illustrate that, in conclusion, hear this story – a true story – from the early church. It's a life story, since this is the week of the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Roe v. Wade, legalizing abortion in our country, and in the Church, the Sanctity of Life Sunday. Well, here's the story: In Roman society during the first few centuries after Jesus, if a father didn't want his baby, he simply threw that child on the trash heap outside the city. And like abortion in our country, it was legal; it was allowed. But, not all of those children discarded in the Roman trash died. For much to the dismay and anger of the parents who tossed out their baby, Christians would arrive at night, rescue those little children, and care for them. Why? Because as Christians, we know something about being adopted and rescued from death. For we have been adopted by God our Father in Holy Baptism, and rescued from death in those waters by the death and resurrection of our Saviour.

And so today, as *many* lives are being thrown away – through abortion, through mercy killing, through assisted suicide, through negligence and selfishness, through drugs, through violence, and in many other ways – **we have an opportunity not unlike those early Christians.** To confess. To confess a Saviour. To confess a Saviour who died and rose again, so that we would not have to die. To confess life in a culture of death. To confess the sanctity of life, and the value of life, and rescue those who are dying and care for them. . . . And it is not too much to do! For it is the truth that has been revealed to us, and that we confess. The truth of our Saviour. The truth of His forgiveness, life, and salvation. That this has been revealed to us is a great blessing, and we continue to be blessed. Now it is time to confess. We simply cannot do otherwise.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.