

18 January 2009
The Confession of St. Peter
and Sanctity of Life Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Christ with the Cross”

Text: Mark 8:27-35 (Acts 4:8-13; 2 Peter 1:1-15)

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

A cross-less Christianity is no Christianity at all, for a Christ without a cross is no Christ at all.

That’s the lesson Peter - and his fellow disciples - had to learn today. They had the *Christ* part figured out, it’s the *cross* part they stumbled over. Just like all of us.

And so Jesus had to teach His loved ones *then*, and His loved ones still *today*, about the necessity of the cross. When Peter confesses “**You are the Christ**” and his fellow disciples all nod their heads in agreement, and when we stand here together and confess “**You are the Christ**” in the words of the Nicene Creed each week - that’s the right answer. A plus! *But what does that mean?* What does it mean to confess Jesus as the Christ?

It is to send Him to the cross.

A pastor friend of mine once said a good and simple test for whether something is Christian is whether you can hang it on a cross. (Rev. Wm. Cwirla) Take a look at much of what passes as modern-day Christianity . . . can you hang it on a cross?

Now, I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking I’m being a bit too hard, because nobody *denies* the cross. They might not talk about it as much as we do, but all Christians know that Jesus died and rose for them.

And that’s true. The problem is not the history. The problem is making the cross history. And by that I mean keeping the cross *past tense*. In a sense, it is. Because some 2,000 years ago (as we confess in the Creed), the man Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate between two other criminals, suffered, died, and was buried. And with that, Jesus accomplished our salvation. It is a completed fact. All that needed to be done was done. His death and resurrection means that we who are joined with Him and die, will also rise with Him and live. And that’s right.

The question is: *how do we want our Jesus today?* Do we want a crucified Jesus or a resurrected Jesus? A suffering Jesus or a successful Jesus? A gruesome and gory Jesus or a pleasing and smiling Jesus?

Well, as I said at the beginning, you can't have one without the other. A cross-less Christianity is no Christianity at all, for a Christ without a cross is no Christ at all. Still today.

And here's where we tie in with Peter - with the Peter who not only one moment confessed: **"You are the Christ"** (as we do), but who then the next moment rebuked Jesus for talking about the cross. Who tried to correct Jesus and tell Him: *No! Your loving heavenly Father won't do that to you. He won't allow it! There will be another way.*

No - any other way is of satan, Peter. The road to life goes through the cross. It *must* be that way. It is the only way.

And it is still the only way. You cannot separate Jesus and His cross. Where He is, there is His cross. Still today. For the Father who lays the cross upon His only-begotten Son still lays the cross upon you and me. To give us life. To give us life through death. To kill the sinner in us. To kill the sin in us. That we rise to a new life with Him. A new life in Him. And so the cross shows us the love and care of God, who is willing to do this for us - not just then, but also now.

But how often do we respond like Peter? Well meaning, to be sure, but wrong nonetheless. Thinking that when problems comes, God will take them away. Assuming that Christians should have an easier life than others. Thinking that Jesus' suffering means that I won't have to suffer. Trying to comfort one another by taking away the cross.

But Jesus loves you too much to be that kind of Christ. *You can't hang that kind of Christianity on a cross.* It might look good on a sign, or in advertisements, or on the covers of books . . . but it's not the Messiah of the Old Testament, the Jesus of the New Testament, or the crucified one who comes to us today in Word and Sacrament. Jesus wants more for you than just a good life now. He wants to give you life forever.

The problem is, like Peter, we keep clinging to this life. Sin has made us disastrously near-sighted! And so Jesus is the Christ with a cross, that we see something bigger. He is the Christ with a cross to make us far-sighted again. He is the Christ with a cross, and bids you come be crucified with Him. To stop trying to find your life in the things of this world, and to find your life in Him. To stop trying to save your life, and instead look to His life. To repent of your glory, success, and

comfort seeking sins, and be raised in His resurrecting forgiveness.

Because . . . did you ever notice? People - Christians - still suffer and die. No matter how successful, no matter how rich, no matter how healthy, no matter how much they try to deny it, no matter how much they've made of their life here and now. Jesus' cross did not do away with suffering, death, and the grave - **but sanctified them**. He made them holy, so that our suffering is not meaningless, our death not hopeless, and our grave not our final resting place. These enemies His cross has co-opted and transformed, to serve Him and His good and gracious will.

Some think that makes Christianity all *doom and gloom*. No - it makes Christianity real, and meaningful, and hopeful. Christianity is not a feel good fantasy story, but the story of our God who got down and dirty with us. Who came into this world of sin, and comes still, with His cross of forgiveness and life. That exactly in the midst of this world of sin and suffering, we have hope, we have forgiveness, and we have life.

So, ***Who do you say that I am?***

That question Jesus asked His disciples on the way to Caesarea Philippi makes all the difference in the world. For only the Christ of the cross is the Lord and Giver of Life. Which is why not only this Sunday, but every Sunday, is Life Sunday. Because every Sunday our Lord is here with His life, to sanctify our lives.

Our world says abortion is the solution to a mistake - Jesus says His forgiveness is.

Our world says suffering is something to be avoided - Jesus says that in suffering we find opportunities for service.

Our world says your value comes from what you do, and therefore the very young and the very old aren't worth very much - Jesus says your value comes from what He did for you. That His dying for you on the cross means you are worth very much, no matter how young or old, able or disabled you are.

Our world says life happens by chance - Jesus says life is a gift given.

Our world says to save yourself and your life at all costs - Jesus says: *I saved you. It is finished*. You are free to live for others.

Our world says death is just a part of life - Jesus says death is death and life is life. And He came to die our death that we may live His life. A life which is eternal.

And so we have a Word of life for a dying world. We have not a smiling, feel good,

“don’t worry be happy” God who doesn’t know what you’re going through - but a Saviour who knows *exactly* what you’re going through. Who knows the devastation of sin. Who knows the sting of disappointment. Who knows the pain of rejection. Who knows the struggle of the cross. Who knows what life in this world is really like. And has said to us, ***“I am with you always.”***

With us in the good times and the bad. With us when we succeed and when we fail. With us when we feel that He is, and even when we don’t. With us not without His cross, but with it. To sanctify us. To place His crucified body and blood into our mouths and say: This is what it means that I am the Christ. That as I was consumed by your sins on the cross, that I be consumed by your mouths now - to give you My life and forgiveness. And no matter what life deals you, it isn’t greater than that.

That is the faith that made Peter and John bold to stand and preach. It is the faith that makes us bold to live and confess with them that Jesus is the Christ. To confess His cross. To confess His life. The life that He gave for us, now gives to us, and wants to give to all. Which is what Life Sunday, and every Sunday, is about. That He gave His life for all, that all may live.

There is no life not worth His life. And so we confess His life and stand for life - for we have His life. Which means we can give *our* life away.

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.