

Hearing, Speaking, and Confessing

Sermon for Pentecost Monday

Sermon Text: Matthew 16:13-20



Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰Then He strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ.

It all had to start at some point. What we call the Church, what we perceive as comfort and strength of faith, what we perceive as brotherly love, what we perceive as responsibility towards the world. It all had to start somewhere and that was in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. It was the birthday of the Church. What happened there can be summarized like this: It’s about “speaking, hearing, and confessing.” “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:36)

What does that look like for us? We should be happy to tell everyone - “we believe in the God who once allowed His Son to become man and die for us, not because we are such good people but precisely because we are evil people. And God raised His Son from the dead and made Him the Savior of the world. That is our salvation.” That’s what our speaking should sound like. But before that can happen, we have to overcome more than our inability to speak. To do this, we ourselves must be overcome by the truth that “Jesus Christ... is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person.” (Martin Luther’s explanation to the Apostles’ Creed) What does our hearing of the truth look like? “We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” (Acts 2:11) This is what many listeners to the first Pentecost sermon said at the time. When the mighty works of God are spoken to us, do we hear them as if the Lord Himself were saying: “I am the truth!” What kind of hearing of the proclamation is it when no one feels struck, no one is frightened, but no one is comforted either? What kind of hearing is this, in which everyone silently agrees that there is basically neither conversion nor salvation and certainly no damnation? God the Holy Spirit calls me through the Gospel, He enlightens me with His gifts, He sanctifies me (that is, He makes me God’s own) in the true faith in the Son Jesus Christ, and He sustains me and allows me to remain in this faith until the end. That is the Pentecost event. How desperately do we need the Holy Spirit again today? If you ask normal Christians today, “who is Christ?”, you come to a sobering realization. According to surveys, only 29 percent of Christians still believe that there is a God who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ.

In our sermon text today, we hear a similar text to the text about the first Pentecost. First of all, it’s about what people say about Jesus. Similar to today, people have memorized phrases or knowledge about the Messiah is simply part of their culture so that everyone talks about it. But no one really knows who and what Christ is and even less about what He does. Jesus is not satisfied with this. That’s why He starts a conversation with His disciples. He wants hearing to lead to faith and confession. In Peter’s first confession, Jesus’ conversation with His disciples begins in private. At first, the conversation remains stuck in the

religious clichés of the time. The phenomenon of Jesus was simply explained by using the conventional models that had been known up to that point. “There was an Elijah or one of the other prophets...” the disciples repeat what they had memorized. But Jesus wants more. He provokes a confession because that’s what matters. What matters is that we recognize and confess Jesus not just as a pious man, but as the Christ. Jesus provokes a confession and Peter does so: “You are the Christ.” This confession is not just talking about thick German-Latin volumes where the laws of the church are found, this confession is lived faith in Christ. Living faith is necessary for the world because it needs answers from us. However, we can’t give these answers if faith is not a living discourse and believed through confession, praise, and prayer. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” It’s surprising that Peter comes to this confession. Jesus immediately confirms the confession with the statement: “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Everything depends on this confession. We realize that every person either stands or falls on this confession to Jesus. There is no in-between here. Although Jesus never published a book, only worked for three years, and is still considered a failure by human standards, there is no other person in the world who had such an impact on the world as Jesus. We are living in the year 2025 and still realize that everything depends on what we say and believe about Jesus. If Jesus were a mere human being, He would either be a madman or Satan himself, calling himself the Son of God. So we have to decide, either we reject Christ completely as a lunatic or confess Him as the Son of God. There is no in-between. Jesus wants confession, He doesn’t ask about attitudes and evaluations, but only about His person. Everything is decided by the person of Jesus. He says it of His own accord: “I am the way and the truth and the life.”

We notice that the conversation between Jesus and His disciples has reached another level after this impressive confession. Jesus now moves seamlessly from Peter to the Church. The confession that God gave to Peter is the foundation stone that leads to the building of the Church. Therefore, speaking, hearing, and confessing will be part of the living building of the Church. One flows into the other so that you can hardly distinguish any more between them. Where there is faith, where there is confession, there the Church is also. Where there is no faith and confession, there is no Church. But this Church is just like its Lord. It isn’t just there for itself, but for the world. It is precisely as this servant Church that Jesus wants to preserve it. This is what Jesus calls and protects His Church for – so that not even the gates of hell will overcome it. The ministry of the Church is to save people. They are to receive forgiveness of sins and consequently a right to a home in heaven. This salvation is always the goal. Even where Peter binds sins, the ultimate goal is, and remains, to save people. We hear the words of our Lord and assume that a mighty power is given into Peter’s hands: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” What power does Peter have? No human or worldly power. The only thing that is given to him is the Word. He only has the Word with which he calls, teaches, rebukes, acquits, and comforts people. Peter and his followers should take care that they are nothing and do nothing else than what the Lord Himself has commissioned them to do. To this day, the Church lives from the promises and assurances that emanate from Jesus. He is the One who builds the Church. The apostles are part of the foundation on which we stand, and it is Jesus, our Cornerstone, who keeps everything stable. Churches and communities come and go, but the Church will remain forever because our Lord wills it so. What an encouragement and comfort that Jesus uses flawed people like Peter for this great work. Amen.