

Pentecost 3 / June 21, 2020

Matthew 10:32

“So everyone who confesses me before men, I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven.”

When was the last time you made confession? Confession means different things to different people. For some people confession means going to a priest or minister, to acknowledge sin and seek forgiveness. We begin our worship by making confession of our sin and our need for the Saviour, so that we may hear again God's words of forgiveness; first spoken in baptism, spoken again in the words of absolution.

Confession is often associated with the admission of wrongdoing, though not necessarily guilt. Not everyone feels guilty for doing wrong. There are websites in which people make anonymous true confessions, which often sound more like boasting, than an honest expression of remorse. I don't know how often it happens in real life, but in movies and novels, people sometimes make death bed confessions, in which they solve a mystery, or implicate themselves or others, in a notorious unsolved crime. Confession means many things to different people.

The English word 'confession' is so strongly associated with the admission of wrong doing, that modern translations of the bible, such as ours, often render the Greek word for confession as 'acknowledge'. But the word 'acknowledge' has its own associations. It sounds more like a simple form of recognition, as opposed to making a serious statement of faith from the deepest recesses of our souls. St. Paul urges his disciple Timothy to be bold in confessing his faith. He says, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." Same Greek word, but if you used the English word 'acknowledge,' instead of 'confession,' it sounds far less inspiring!

A confession, whether of faith or of wrong doing, is something that comes from the very heart of our soul. To confess Jesus as Lord, is to testify that He is the heart of our souls and that nothing is more important than our faith in Him! Jesus said, "So everyone who confesses me before men, I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven." Nothing is more important than confessing Jesus as Saviour and Lord!

Confession is most important to Jesus. In our gospel He says that if we will confess Him before people, even in the face of persecution and under the threat of death; He will confess us before His Father in heaven. Conversely, He says if we deny Him before people, He will deny us before His Father in heaven. That's serious business! It's the difference between heaven and hell, between eternal death and eternal life! It underscores Jesus' claim to be the most important and unique person who has ever lived.

He claims to be both the Son of God from eternity and a human being in time. He claims to be our only Saviour from sin and the condemnation of eternal death. He claims to be the one who brings God's righteous reign into the world, beginning with the human heart. He claims a place in our hearts, as the only one who can bring us to the Father in peace. He says that if we confess Him as our own Saviour, He will confess us as His own people in the presence of His Father and brings us into heaven. If He really is who He says He is (the Son of God), if He really is what He claims to be (the only way to the Father), the way we see Him and what we confess about Him will affect our eternal destiny. Confessing Jesus as Lord and Saviour is the most serious matter, because it affects our destiny both in time and for eternity.

Confessing Jesus can be an intimidating experience. Believers have paid with their lives for confessing Jesus. But the life they lost in time, they saved for eternity. Nothing is more important than eternity! Jesus is the Son of God, who brings us into His Father's presence in peace in time and for eternity. Even if it should cause us suffering in time, we should treat our relationship with Him, as of ultimate importance. In this gospel Jesus challenges us to order our lives with Him as our number one priority.

Many things are important in life and have a legitimate claim on our time and resources, but no one is more important than Jesus and nothing is more important than confessing Him as Lord. There are many people who are very important to us, some we can't imagine living without. Jesus is the one person we can't live without. He is our life in time and for eternity. Nothing is more important than confessing Him as our Saviour and Lord!

In our gospel, Jesus was speaking to His twelve closest disciples, to prepare them for their first missionary journey. He was sending them into the towns and villages of Israel, to proclaim the righteous reign of God in the earth; and Himself as the Messiah, through whom God begins His reign in the human heart. This was an important matter and a serious business. In fact, nothing is more important and no work is more serious. This

Jesus they proclaimed as Messiah, was God coming into the world, to remove the curse of sin and lift its effects from the whole earth, beginning with the human spirit.

They would be proclaiming the good news of God's righteous reign breaking into the creation, making all things new; beginning with the human heart. It is the greatest news, for it is the beginning of the end of the reign of sin, the devil and death. Jesus showed Himself the Messiah through whom God reigns in the earth and in the human spirit: by healing the sick, casting out evil spirits, raising the dead and forgiving sin. The disciples would share in the work of proclaiming God's righteous reign and the renewal of all things, by calling people into God's kingdom through faith in His Name. We also are called to share in the work of proclaiming God's righteous reign, by confessing Jesus as our Saviour and calling others to faith in His Name.

They would be proclaiming good news, the gospel of forgiveness and favour with God; the best news ever! But it wouldn't be good news to everyone. The devil certainly didn't think it was good news. He considers the world his personal domain and the human heart his throne. When he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he showed him all the kingdoms of the earth, said they had been given to him. He offered to give them to Jesus, if He would worship him. In the gospel of John, Jesus referred to the devil as the prince of the world. He wasn't happy when Jesus assaulted his kingdom and sent the disciples to do the same.

The world didn't think the gospel was good news. The world is the human spirit separated from God through sin, turned away from God in its thoughts and hostile to Him in its attitude. The world doesn't want the righteous reign of God any more than the devil. The world and the devil condemned Jesus to death on Good Friday and rejected the kingdom of God when they crucified Him. But in dying, Jesus won the victory over sin and in rising, He proclaims His triumph over the devil and death. Jesus' death and resurrection are the foundation of God's kingdom on the earth and the sign of His victory!

Nevertheless, despite having lost the war, the world and the devil continue the fight and reject the righteous reign of God and oppose His kingdom. Jesus warned the disciples and all who follow in faith, to expect persecution, suffering and even death for the sake of His name. In Revelation Jesus said to the church "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life." He says, whoever loses her or his life for His sake, will save it for eternity. He says the one who remains faithful in his or her confession and endures to the end, will be saved!

How do you feel about confessing Jesus before other people? I suppose it depends up the circumstance and situation in which we are called to make that confession. We confess Jesus when we gather for worship and speak together the great creeds of the church. We are part of a group of people, in a friendly environment, so that's not intimidating. We make a public confession of Jesus at our baptism and confirmation. We are on centre stage, confessing as individuals or as part of a smaller group, so that may be a little intimidating. But since, we are confessing to a friendly audience of fellow believers, it's not extremely intimidating.

How would you feel confessing Jesus to a group of your coworkers, classmates and friends who are not church goers, but who ask what your church believes? It might feel awkward, maybe you would blush with anxiety, but you probably wouldn't feel a physical threat. How would you feel if you were summoned by a powerful, hostile authority and questioned about your faith in Jesus? If it came with a real threat to your physical well-being, would you be able to confess Jesus?

I suppose we wouldn't know for certain unless we were put to such a test. If we were put to the test, we hope and we pray we would make a good confession. It would be extremely intimidating and so we pray God to keep us from such a test. Such a situation is so far from our experience that it might be hard to imagine such a thing happening, but things are changing quickly in the world and it could happen sooner than we think. There are many places in the world, where the authorities are quietly hostile to Christians. There are other places in the world where the authorities and other groups are openly hostile to God's word and violent towards Christians.

We don't want to suffer persecution. We want to be accepted, but Jesus plainly says that we will be persecuted for the sake of His name. None of us wants to be hated, we want to be loved. But what is most important is not that we are our loved by the world, but that Jesus loves us. Jesus is more important than the world and anything in the world.

When Peter was called to confess Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest, he denied three times that he knew Jesus. When Jesus caught up with Peter after His resurrection, He asked Him just one question, three times: "Do you love me?" This time Peter made the good confession. He said, "Lord, you know that I love

you!” Jesus loves us. We love Him, because He loves us. We confess Him, because He loves us. Jesus loves us and He will confess His love for us before His Father in heaven. His love empowers and impels us to confess our love for Him before others!

Jesus said, “So everyone who confesses me before men, I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven.” Jesus confessed His love for us before His Father in heaven, by clothing Himself with our humanity and becoming one with us and one of us, through His conception by the Holy Spirit and birth by the Virgin Mary. That’s how much He loves the whole human race! He confessed His love for the world, by bearing our sins through His death on the cross. That’s how much He loves you! He calls us to Himself through the gospel by the voice of the church saying, ‘Come to me for I have come for you.’ He calls others to Himself through our voices as members of His Church, as we confess His Name and His love them.

He calls us to be faithful in our confession. He promises the gift of eternal life to all who endure to the end. He gives us His Spirit that we may endure and make a good confession. He speaks to us words of comfort, forgiveness and encouragement in the Scriptures. He washes away the guilt of our sin in the water of our baptism. He nourishes our faith, makes it strong and gives it growth, through the sacrament of His body and blood. He is faithful and one day He will confess to His Father in heaven that we are His sisters and brothers; dearly loved, redeemed by His blood and heirs of eternal life. He is our faithful Saviour through whom God has begun to reign in our hearts and so, we are faithful to confess Him as our Saviour.

In Jesus’ Name. Amen