

## People of Confession

Easter 3; Series A

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

I can recall a time very early on in my training for the Pastoral Ministry that I was called upon to speak for God and I felt absolutely unprepared, unqualified, and utterly clueless. I was twenty-four years old at the time, unmarried, and just starting my second year of my Seminary studies. I received a phone call from the Senior Pastor at the congregation where I did my field work during my Seminary years. He was also my supervisor for my field work training at this particular congregation. He was going to be out of town and needed someone to teach a class for him on Sunday evening. The other two associate pastors were unable to fill in for him and so he went to his fourth string guy—a young student in training who knew little else but to say “yes” to everything his supervising field work pastor told him to do. It turned out that I had said “yes” to teaching a Christian parenting class. Did I already tell you that at the time I was twenty-four years old, unmarried, and obviously not the father of any children of my own? I was called upon to speak for God and say what his Word, the Bible, says about the topic of Christian parenting and, needless to say, I felt unprepared, unqualified, and utterly clueless.

I bring to mind this story because it illustrates so well an understanding of what it means and looks like to confess the Christian faith. Opportunities regularly present themselves to all of us in the midst of our everyday living. It also illustrates how unqualified, unprepared, and terrified we all can feel as Christians to actually do it.

The word “confession” in the Church is used often in two ways. It is used to speak of confessing our sins to God. We did it to begin our service this morning. With our very own lips we said to God, “I am by nature sinful and unclean. I have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what I have done and by what I have left undone. I have not loved you with my whole heart; I have not loved my neighbor as myself” (*LSB* 167). In doing so it is not meant to make us feel bad and leave us with a feeling of guilt. It is meant to make us feel good. In confessing our sins together in the service, alone in a prayer to God, or even to another Christian or to your Pastor, we are saying the same thing that God says about us and our sinful condition. We cast our burdens and sins upon our God so that he can give us a word of forgiveness, an entirely clean heart and mind. We are then left not with our sins to remember, but these words from God: “I forgive you.”

The other way that the word confession is used is in speaking of confessing our Christian faith. We do this together during our Sunday services when we speak together our Christian faith, along with the Christian Church throughout the centuries and with all of the saints who have died in the faith before us, even our Christian family members. We confess the faith in the words of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. This morning we confessed our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed. In doing so we say the same thing that the Bible says about the Christian faith and what it is that we believe. At its very core “confession” means speaking to and even for God and saying the same thing that he and his Word, the Bible says. We regularly say the same thing that he and his Word says about our sinfulness and about the basics of what we believe as the Christian Church.

As Christians God calls us to be people of confession wherever we are. We live as his faithful, baptized children when we live as people of confession not just in Church on Sunday morning, but also in our homes and in the public square like our places of employment, our grocery stores, our department stores, our movie theaters, our beaches.

In our reading from the Book of Acts we behold Peter confessing in public. Our reading even told us that this is what he was doing. It is the verse that our lectionary system calls Acts 2:14a, the first verse of our reading. St. Luke writes this description of the events of Pentecost Day in Acts, chapter two and he says, "But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them . . ." Peter speaks for God. On the Day of Pentecost, the day that God poured out his Holy Spirit on his people, fifty days after that first Easter Sunday, Peter stands in the middle of a crowd of people in a public place in the middle of the city of Jerusalem and he preaches. He is God's public spokesperson and representative who says the same thing that God says about this person, Jesus of Nazareth. Peter interprets the words of prophets that spoke for God in the Old Testament and shows how it all is coming true in this Jesus. And we heard a small fragment of his sermon, his confession of the faith this morning: "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). Peter lifts up his voice and confesses the Christian Faith. Peter speaks for God and says what God says about Jesus.

At first glance we shouldn't be that surprised that Peter is speaking. Throughout the three years of following Jesus as his disciple, Peter was never really at a loss for words. At the Transfiguration of Jesus interrupted the glorious vision of Jesus standing in the middle of Moses and Elijah and said, "Lord it is good that we are hear. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah" (Mt 17:4). On the Sea of Galilee Peter was the one who cried out to Jesus, "Lord save me" as he started sinking after stepping out of the boat and walking toward Jesus on the water (Mt 14:29-30). In the region of Galilee Peter was the one who confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God and then immediately after rebuked the Lord when Jesus told him that his death and resurrection were the necessary things he must do to be the Christ (Mt 16:16-22). Still Peter was one of the disciples in the upper room, on the night Jesus was betrayed, who told Jesus that he would never betray him (Mt 26:33) and then that same night denied him three times (Mt 26:69-75). Peter was among the rest of the disciples who were hiding in fear behind locked doors shortly after the death of Jesus (Jn 20: 19). Peter, who was never at a loss for words as Jesus' disciple, was now finding himself not only speaking against Jesus but even unprepared, unqualified, and terrified to speak at all.

As Christians Sometimes you and I are afraid to speak for God aren't we? You might think that you are unqualified to speak about God's plan for marriage because you were once divorced. You might think that you are unprepared to speak for God about sexual purity because your past actions were inconsistent with God's Will about such things. You might think that you are unqualified to answer a question with conviction about what the Bible says or about what the Church teaches because you do not have the training. You might think that you are incapable of speaking for God because you think you are too young, too old, or too imperfect. You may be terrified or scared to use all that God has given you, your time, your talents and skills, even your finances as gifts to be used by him.

Brothers and sisters, take comfort in these words, "But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them" (Acts 2:14a). Your God specializes in using unqualified, unprepared, and terrified people to speak for him and be bold, courageous people of confession.

It is very significant that Peter lifted up his voice and spoke on Pentecost Sunday, the day that the Holy Spirit was given as a gift to God's people. That first Pentecost Sunday took place only fifty days after Peter and the other disciples were huddled in fear behind locked doors with no courage at all to speak for God. And now, just fifty days later, these same men are standing together in public and God opens the mouth of one of them, fills him with his Spirit, and gives him boldness and courage to speak for him. His fear and inadequacies were baptized in the water and the Spirit. And now he speaks.

Scripture tells us that "through him (Jesus) we have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18). One came who spoke for God with courage and conviction. Indeed, he had authority to do so because he was the very Word of God incarnate. It is interesting that Jesus was never at a loss for words until his trial and execution. Scripture tells us that he was silent and spoke not a word. Like a lamb before the shears is silent, so this Lamb of God was silent. But only the guilty are silent and have no defense. And that is the point. This innocent, Son of God took the guilt for us. That is how he speaks. He speaks through his actions. He speaks in silence for you. By taking our place in judgment before God he took all our guilt and sin away. He took away those moments even when you and I lack the courage to speak for God, not only with our words, but even our actions. Yet, on the cross the sinless Lamb of God did finally speak. After the conviction, after the trial, now living out his execution he spoke to God for you: "Father, forgive them" (Lk 23:34). And he continues to intercede to the Heavenly Father for you.

God now empowers you and me to speak for him. Just as our Lord spoke for us and represented us best through his sacrificial actions, so too we speak for God not just with our words but also our actions. This month here at Atonement is stewardship month. We have a lot going on. Last Sunday we considered a strategic plan that will be voted on for adoption at our annual Voters' Meeting on May 19. We will also consider a new budget for the year. All this is stewardship. In other words, we are considering how we can confess the faith. We are considering how each of us individually and together as a congregation can speak for God not just with our words but our actions. We consider how we can boldly and courageously confess the faith by supporting the work of the Church with our time, talents, and financial treasures that he has given us. By the grace of the one who first spoke for us and still speaks for us, interceding for us to the Father on our behalf, may we move forward together as a congregation. Through the gift of God's Spirit we always move forward in faith. Amen.