

Sermon: 10th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 16:13-20 – Peter’s Confession of Christ

Theme: Jesus – the Christ of God!

Goal: To confess Jesus as the Christ – according to God’ plan, and not according to our human wishes.

Dear friends:

Introd.: I was just three weeks in Nairobi when I visited a mosque for the very first time. They were very kind with and invited me to enter; (I needed to take out my shoes); they showed me all and gave me some pamphlets. Then one of them asked me: What do you think about Jesus? –I answered: Jesus is the Son of God, my Savior. – He said: No, Jesus cannot be the son of God; God is not married to a woman to have a son... He is just a prophet...

I – “Who do people say the Son of man is?”

This was just the answer the disciples gave to Jesus on behalf of the people when he asked: “Who do people say the Son of man is?” – And the disciples “replied : Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets .”

A contemporary Africa Bible Commentary says: *“We have been presented with many ‘images’ or ‘faces’ of Jesus. There is Jesus the healer, Jesus the spiritual leader, Jesus the political activist, Jesus the worker, Jesus the lover of children, Jesus the friend of sinners, Jesus the exorcist of demons, and so.”* (p.1221); and I will add one more: Jesus, the money-giver, or: the patron of prosperity, according to the new Theology of Prosperity!

Everyone builds an image of Jesus according to his wishes and desires. Sometimes they transfer the hopes they put in the gods of their forefathers to Jesus, just changing the name, but not changing the concept. So, many use the name of Jesus, but not in the correct

way. They are just looking for some personal advantages and temporary blessings – as some people that approached Jesus to receive a piece of bread or a healing that time. For them, Jesus is a good man, a prophet, a model of life, a ruler (the new Moses...). They don't like to look to the crucified Lord; they don't like the "theology of the cross", but just the "theology of the glory".

"Who do people say the Son of man is?" – is a very actual question, and the answer of that questions will determine our future, our eternal future. Is Jesus for you just a prophet? A healer? A temporary helper for some material necessities?

II – "Who do you say I am?"

Yeah, "but what about you?" - Jesus asked to his disciples – and asks us today. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered the right answer: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living of God!" – the promised Messiah, that we are waiting for a long time. (Christ and Messiah are the same word, one in Greek, another in Hebrew). Peter confessed his faith and the true faith of all true Christians from all times!

But even that answer can be misused and misunderstand. The concept of "Christ" or "Messiah" for many people was a political concept. The Christ would restore the throne of King David. This was the accusation against Jesus before Pilate; and this was written over the cross: Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudorum - INRI– Jesus of Nazareth – the King of the Jews. – Do the disciples have this concept of the Messiah too? It seems to be so. Therefore Jesus talked (just after Peter's confession) for the very first time clearly about his suffering and his death. The Messiah is the suffering "Servant of the Lord" predicted in Isaiah chapter 53. "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Is 53:5) The task of

the Messiah was more than to give bread and to heal the people from their body illnesses. He came to reconcile God with mankind through his sacrifice on the cross. He did what we could not do: to pay for our transgressions. All he did was on our behalf. He himself didn't need anything. He came to assume our position of sinners, condemned sinners; so that we should assume His condition: to be children of God! Through His sacrifice for us, now we have forgiveness of our sins when we believe in Him as the “Christ, the Son of the living of God”, the Messiah of God, the fulfillment of all God's promises.

“What about you?” – is the question Jesus is asking you now. Is this your faith about Jesus? If so, you are a blessed one, and you have the forgiveness and the hope only Jesus can give you. - If not, the pastor is here to help you and to lead you to the true faith. Read more the Bible and seek for the truth, so that your faith will lead you to the presence of God through Christ for all eternity; and not just for some temporary benefits that will finish with your death. The benefits of salvation Jesus wants to give us are going with us even after our death.

III – To confess Jesus as “the Christ of God”

It's necessary to confess this true faith not only inside the church in our service, but also outside, to all the world. As so many have a different faith in Jesus, let us confess the true faith. How do we do it? Taking our cross daily and following Jesus. Not only words, but the example of our lives shine in the darkness. The Christian life is sometimes very hard. To follow Jesus is not just to walk in the glory, in good times. The cross – suffering and pain because the faith – is something that is part of the life of a Christian. To subdue our old Adam, our sinful nature, is a daily fight. We need to say “NO” to many things which are natural for most of the people, but not for a Christian; and this is sometimes hard! We are coming to the church every Sunday when many other are still at home enjoying the holiday

or going to the club. But this is to “confess Christ”: to live according to His will, to follow Jesus’ paths in good and in bad days. “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and lose or forfeit his very self?” (Luke 9:25).

But Jesus didn’t talk only about his suffering and death as the Messiah of God, and about our cross. He always mentioned His resurrection on the third day too!!! After suffering, the victory, the glory for ever and ever! This message of hope fills our hearts! We have a new life in Christ, as Christ was raised from the death! When all human hopes are finished, the Christian hope gives us strength to lift our eyes to the empty cross and to say: Jesus is the victor even over the death! And he gives me his victory too!

Conclusion: Jesus is the Christ of God! Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world –as we sing at every Lord’s Supper – and He takes my sins away too. In Him we put our confidence, in His name we pray to God the Father.

Let me share with you a thought of Luther about the true faith and *“what does it mean to have a god, or, what is God?”* He said: *“A god is that from which we are to expect everything good and to which we are to take refuge in all times of need. Therefore to have a god is simply to trust and believe in him. It is, as I have often said, only the heart’s confidence and faith make both God and an idol. If your faith and confidence are right, your God will be right too. On the other hand, if your confidence is false and wrong, you do not have the true God; for these two, faith and God, are correlative concepts. Therefore I say that your god in reality is that around which you entwine your heart and on which you place your confidence.”* (WLS 1637)

Let us adore and confess always the true God, who reveled Himself through his Son Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Cape Town, 21 August 2011