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Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, whenever I come to this passage in Scripture...

Whenever I read this text known as "The Confession of Peter" ...I can't help but think of the words of C.S. Lewis.

C.S. Lewis of *The Chronicles of Narnia* fame.

C.S. Lewis, who was a professor at Oxford and Cambridge.

C.S. Lewis, who had turned to atheism in his youth, returned to Christianity in his 30s, and who came to champion Christianity the rest of his life through his many writings and radio broadcasts.

Yes, I think of C.S. Lewis when I come to this passage in Scripture about Peter's Confession.

And specifically, I think of a little book entitled *Mere Christianity*, which I recommend to you if you haven't read it.

I would almost bet your local library would have a copy or two.

The book was adapted from a series of BBC radio talks made between 1941-1944, while Lewis was at Oxford during World War II.

The book is considered a classic in Christian apologetics, which means the book is a defense of the Christian faith.

And there is one particular passage in the book that comes to mind every time I think of Peter's Confession.

Let me read it to you.

C.S. Lewis is going along defending the Christian faith when he says at one point, "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people

often say about Him [Jesus], 'I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.'"

Lewis says, "That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But being a great human teacher, He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

This passage is famously called the Trilemma Argument.

It is a play on the word dilemma.

The Trilemma argument is also called the "Liar, Lunatic, or Lord" argument or the "Bad, Mad, or God" argument.

In other words, Jesus is either a liar, lying about who he is, and so he is the Devil. Or, Jesus is a lunatic, believing he is that which is not. Or, Jesus is who he says he is, the Son of God.

The choice is ours.

Now, this dilemma, or trilemma was as real for the people living in Jesus' time as it is for us today.

For notice, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

Now, some thought that Jesus was a prophet, like Elijah or Jeremiah, Jesus was maybe the equivalent of a wise prophetic teacher, but certainly not God.

And there were others who thought Jesus was mad or that he was demon possessed.

In Mark 3:19f., the text says, "Then Jesus went home; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.' And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul,' (a demon whose name means 'The Lord of the Flies.')

The scribes said, “He has Beelzebul and the by the ruler of demons he casts out demons.”

So yes, even in Jesus’ day, people were divided about who he was.

Was he a great teacher or a prophet?

Was he mad or demon-possessed?

Or was the Messiah, the Son of the living God?

Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

And there was a whole litany of responses.

And then Jesus asks the disciples, “But who do you say that I am? Who do you say that I am?”

How would you answer that question today?

PAUSE

And when I say “how” I am not just talking about our choice.

“Jesus is God’s Son.”

No, “how” we answer that question has a lot to do with “how” we devote our time, how we give of our energy, how we offer our resources to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Belief, you see, has everything to do with our commitment to Jesus.

You see, belief is not just head knowledge.

I believe Jesus is Lord.

No, true faith is belief in action, what we might call heart knowledge.

There is famous story that captures what I am talking about.

It is a story about Charles Blondin, who was a tightrope walker.

The story is about the time he pushed an empty wheelbarrow on a tightrope across the Niagara Falls.

This was a feat he accomplished in the summer of 1859.

Indeed, Blondin made this crossing several times.

He made this ¼ mile crossing, 160 feet above the Falls, once in a sack, another time on stilts, and another time on a bicycle.

And once he even carried a stove and cooked an omelet.

But it was on July 15, 1859, that Blondin walked backward across the tightrope to Canada and made the return crossing, pushing a wheelbarrow.

And the story is told then that it was after pushing a wheelbarrow across blindfolded that Blondin asked for some audience participation.

The crowds had watched and had “oohed” and “aahed.”

Blondin had proved that he could cross the falls pushing a wheelbarrow.

But now he was saying that he could take a person in the wheelbarrow across the Falls with him.

It is said that he asked his audience, “Do you believe I can carry a person across in this wheelbarrow?”

Of course, the crowd shouted that yes, they believed!

And so Blondin posed the question, “Who will get in the wheelbarrow?”

And no one volunteered.

PAUSE

That story is about commitment.

Commitment is about “how” we respond in faith.

It is about “how” we would answer the question, “Who do we say Jesus is?”

Blondin makes a good point.

It is one thing to say, “I believe you could push a person across that tightrope in the wheelbarrow.”

But it is another thing altogether for that same person to be willing to get into the wheelbarrow.

That takes real commitment.

PAUSE

Our gospel reading then is like volunteering to get into the wheelbarrow.

Jesus confronts his disciples with a choice here.

You can get in the wheelbarrow and come across the tightrope with me.

You can follow me and journey to Jerusalem and the cross.

You can acknowledge that I am who I say I am, that I am the Messiah, that I am the Son of God and devote your life to me.

Or you can call me a fool, a madman, or demon-possessed, and you can go your separate way, and you can avoid the wheelbarrow altogether.

PAUSE

Now, this question of commitment is a question we face all the time, and not just with reference to Jesus Christ.

Whether we are talking about a commitment to another person, to our job, or to the care of our planet...you name it.

We are all confronted by commitments all the time.

Right now, our country is struggling with its commitment to all of its citizenry, to all of its people, not just certain people.

This country is struggling with that commitment to be fair and just to all people.

And some who feel oppressed are saying, "This country is not my country. Its values are not my values," but many of these same persons are striving civilly, peacefully, to reform our society.

And some would say to those persons, "If you don't like it here, nobody is saying you have to stay."

Indeed, some would see these persons who oppose the present America as persons who are unpatriotic.

But, it might just be the fact that these persons, who are striving to reform our society in civil ways, are truly more patriotic than others might give them credit.

For these persons love this country so much so as to strive to reform this country.

These persons love this country so much as to care enough to see it shine in all its glory.

These persons love this country so much that they will voice their opinion, they will march in the street, and they will petition the powers-that-be.

Indeed these persons believe, but not just with their words.

These persons are committed to a vision for a better society, a more fair and just society.

And God bless them for that commitment.

And I could only pray that if the time came for me personally to be called to action that I would be able to “believe” as these persons do.

PAUSE

But, to the contrary, we see that many others also don't like the ways things are, but they say they can do nothing about it, and so by not doing anything, they lend their silent support to the present reality.

You see, Friends, when it comes to commitment, we can't have it both ways.

We can't say one thing and do something else.

Either we are all in, or we are not.

Either we really believe and will get in that wheelbarrow, or our commitment to what we believe is questionable at best.

PAUSE

Yes, commitments are all around us, and the truth is that every commitment is a choice.

Yes, sometimes we have relationships in our lives that are not the way we would hope they would be.

We might not get along with our kids, or with our parents, or with our spouse, or with our boss, or with our neighbors, or with people here at church.

And we can either commit ourselves to the very, very difficult work of maintaining those relationships or we can let them go.

Sometimes that commitment—the commitment to let go—is just as hard, and maybe even necessary.

But, when it comes to relationships there is one we know who is so committed to us that he will not let us go.

And that is God.

If we ever wanted to see what true commitment looks like...

If we ever wanted to know what it looks like to get in the wheelbarrow with absolute faith, then we need not look any further than to Jesus Christ.

God is all in when it comes to God's commitment to the human family and to his creation.

God came into this world in the person of Jesus Christ.

God came into this world and died for our salvation.

That is commitment.

Now, we as people will let each other down, because we are human.

No matter how hard we try, our commitment wavers, it falters.

That is why we begin each week here with the Confession of Sins.

Our commitment is fragile at best, but it is not so with God.

God is committed to you and me, and to this world and all its inhabitants.

We see God's commitment in the incarnation, when God came to be with us, and we see it at the cross, when God died for us.

PAUSE

And so we come back to the question, with which we began this sermon.

Who do you say Jesus is?

Is he a madman? Absolutely, he is insanely devoted to our salvation.

Is he possessed? Absolutely, possessed by divine love for you and me.

Is he the Son of God? Well, if he isn't then we don't want any other, for no one else is so mad, so possessed, that he would die and be raised that we might know God for all eternity.

Thanks be to God. Amen.