

January 18, 2026 – Mark 8:27-35 (Feast of the Confession of St Peter)

Have you ever wondered what other people thought of you? I think it's a pretty common consideration. You interview for a job and afterwards you wonder, "Did I sound intelligent? Competent? Responsible?" You go on a first date with someone, come home, and start thinking, "Did I make a good first impression? Did I look nice? Did I put my foot in my mouth?"

Now, the truth is that we have these thoughts primarily out of vanity. We're proud people. We don't want to humiliate ourselves. We want to sound smart and funny. We want to look responsible and attractive. Whether or not we actually are smart, funny, responsible, or attractive. We wanna look that way, at the very least.

Today, Jesus asks a question just like that. "*Who do people say that I am?*" What do people think about me? What are they saying? If this were any other person, we might assumed that it was asked out of vanity. Insecurity. Pride. But this is Jesus who's asking. And sinful human flaws like vanity, insecurity, and pride just don't apply to him. So there must be more going. And there is.

But I'm not sure his disciples have considered that. Because the answers they give are absolutely glowing. I mean, we know that Jesus had enemies. Powerful ones. Who thought he was doing miracles by the power of Satan. But the disciples don't mention their opinion of Jesus. The disciples only mention the really positive things people have said.

John the Baptist. Elijah. One of the prophets. Respectful answers. Religious answers. Admirable answers. All of which place Jesus safely in the category of great religious figures. Men sent by God. Men who speak for God. Men who point beyond themselves. But none of these answers reveal who He actually is.

So then Jesus asks the real question. The important question. The question that gets at the reason why Jesus is suddenly interested in other peoples' opinions of him. "*Who do you say that I am?*" Not what do other people think. Not what have you heard. Not what seems reasonable. You. Who do you say that I am? And Peter answers, "*You are the Christ.*"

It's the right answer. It's the true confession. It's the confession on which the Church stands. Jesus is not merely a prophet. He is not simply a teacher. He is not just an example of godliness. He is the Christ. The Anointed One. The promised Savior. The Son of the living God.

And it is a confession that is so important, that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record it and the church has, from its earliest days, commemorated Peter for speaking it. It is an essential truth of our faith. We are Christians because we believe, teach, and confess that Jesus is the Christ.

But as the remainder of this Gospel reading makes painfully clear, it's possible to say the right words and still completely misunderstand what they mean. Because as soon as Peter confesses this, Jesus begins to teach. He doesn't bask in the compliment. He doesn't accept the praise and move on. Because, as I said, this was never about vanity or pride.

Instead, He begins to explain what kind of Christ He is. What it means to be the Christ. "*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.*" And Mark is careful to note, "*He said this plainly.*" No parables. No riddles. No veiled language. Just plain words about suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection.

And for that, Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him. Which, I think you can imagine, is never a good idea. The man who just confessed that Jesus is the Christ now tells the Christ that He is wrong about being the Christ. The disciple corrects the Master. The sinner instructs the Savior.

Why? Because Peter's idea of the Christ just didn't include a cross. Peter could imagine glory. He could imagine victory. He could imagine restoration and triumph and honor. But suffering? Rejection? Death? Those things just didn't fit in his idea of the Christ. They didn't sound like winning. They didn't sound like saving. They didn't sound like the kingdom of God to him.

And yet, Peter's problem is a problem for all sinful human beings. Including sinful Christians like you and me. Because we're very willing to confess Jesus when He fits our expectations. We're very willing to confess Jesus when He appears strong, successful, victorious, impressive. We're very willing to confess Jesus when He blesses us. When he protects us. When he provides for us. When he fixes our problems.

But a Christ who suffers? A Christ who is rejected? A Christ who is mocked, beaten, nailed to a cross, and buried in a borrowed tomb? That Christ is a bit harder to follow. And, even more so, he's difficult to follow when he calls us to take up our cross and follow Him. When he threatens our comfort, our control, our plans, and our sense of safety.

We look at Peter and we shake our heads that he could be foolish enough to try and correct the Christ, his Lord. But when faced with the cross, we do something quite similar. Not with our words, perhaps, but with our expectations, with our priorities, with our theology. We reshape Christ into what we think He should be. We confess Him, but on our terms.

We confess Him on our terms when we want forgiveness, but not repentance. When we keep His name in our prayers but keep His Word out of our decisions. When we trust His promises for eternity but not His commands for Monday morning.

We confess Him on our terms when we are glad He died for our sins, but uneasy when He names those sins. When we want a Savior who rescues us from consequences but not one who calls us away from the patterns that lead to them. We confess Him on our terms when we prefer a private faith that never risks public witness, a discipleship that never costs reputation, relationships, or comfort.

And that is why Jesus responds so sharply. He doesn't whisper. He doesn't soften it. He turns and says, *"Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

Now, as bad as this sounds, this isn't Jesus rejecting Peter. This is Jesus putting Peter back where he belongs: behind Him. Following Jesus, not leading Him. Not correcting the Christ, but trusting the Christ.

Because the cross isn't an unfortunate accident. It is not a tragic interruption of God's plan. It is the plan. *"The Son of Man must suffer."* Must. This is how salvation happens. This is how sin is atoned for. This is how death is defeated. This is how God so loves the world.

A Christ without the cross is not the Christ. And a confession that avoids suffering is not a saving confession. A Jesus who only affirms what we want and never atones cannot rescue sinners. So Jesus calls not only Peter but the whole crowd. *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*

Jesus doesn't call you to self-improvement, self-expression, or self-fulfillment. He calls you to deny yourself. Die to yourself. Let the old sinful self be put to death. Let your pride be crucified. Let your control be stripped away. Let your self-righteousness be buried in a tomb. And follow a Savior who walks the road of suffering for you and before you.

*"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."* We spend so much energy seeking security and protection. Justifying and defending ourselves. We try to save our lives. And in doing so, we lose what actually matters. But when Christ gives us His life through His death and resurrection, then even if we lose everything else, we haven't lost what counts. We have life that can't be taken away.

This is the daily reality of repentance. Daily drowning of the old Adam. Daily returning to the baptismal font. Daily hearing again that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Because Peter doesn't become a fearless confessor of the faith overnight. The same man who confesses Jesus as the Christ here will deny even know Jesus three times.

And yet Jesus never rejects him. Jesus restores him. Jesus forgives him. Jesus sends him out. Until we see what only Christ can produce: Peter standing before the same kinds of authorities who condemned Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly confessing, *“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

The Church isn't preserved by strong personalities. It isn't built on human courage. It doesn't stand because her confessors never fail. The Church stands because Christ does not fail. She stands because Christ has suffered. Christ has been rejected. Christ has died. Christ has risen. And Christ continues to speak His Word and give His Spirit and forgive His people.

So on this Feast of the Confession of St. Peter, we don't celebrate Peter's strength. We celebrate Christ's mercy. We don't praise Peter's insight. We praise God's revelation. We don't trust in the steadfastness of human faith, but in the faithfulness of our crucified and risen Lord.

Who do you say that Jesus is? He is the Christ, the son of the Living God. Who died and rose again, for you and for me, that we may follow him. Amen.