

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

Welcome on this day as we celebrate the founding of this congregation 90 years ago. This solidly Lutheran congregation is built on the foundation of Christ crucified, that we are saved entirely by grace through faith, a gift of our God. Built on this foundation of Christ, which cannot be shaken though all the forces of hades are marshaled against it. And you and I continue to build on that foundation, following in the footsteps of those who came before, adding to the legacy they have so ably left us.

This morning we have that declaration from Peter: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Now many folks today think of Jesus, if they think of him at all, as a good man, a great teacher, but they don't go much further than that. They may remember some of what they learned in Sunday School, Vacation Bible School or even confirmation if they went that far. Folks often want to be married in a church, particularly if they were raised in that church or have family ties to that church. They often want to have funeral services done in a church for much the same reasons. For many people, there is nothing about Jesus that might call them to examine their beliefs or re-examine their commitments. They certainly have no interest in living their lives in such a manner that the light of Jesus might shine through them.

But inspired by our Father in heaven, Peter's confession connects Jesus to God, if I may loosely paraphrase Martin Luther, this means Peter looks to Jesus for all that is good and to Jesus as our refuge in all needs. Jesus is Lord, the Word who was with God in the beginning, through whom all things were created, including life. Doing as Paul has urged us to do, Peter offers himself, a living sacrifice, and he does this in the district of Caesarea Philippi, an area of pagan temple sacrifice. Peter is not conformed to the wisdom of this world which brings death, but rather he is transformed and we can see God working in him, in this world, and in ourselves.

And transformation is what has to happen in our congregations every day, day after day. We gather as a congregation of the Church in this time and place, as has been done for 90 years now, so that the implications of Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, Lord, Savior, Messiah, and ourselves as living sacrifices can all be shown and lived in our daily living. My friends, it is not a case of simply living, coming to worship, gathering here around Word and Sacrament, then going back into the world hoping to live in anonymity. We are to live so others can see we too confess Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

What we call mainstream churches may be in crisis mode across this nation, and one big reason is so many people who attend worship services regularly insist on living with a disconnect between their worship and their lives, between what they confess and what they say about ourselves. In other words, are they, are we, living sacrifices?

As I mentioned when beginning this sermon, we are part of a solidly Lutheran congregation as our forefathers were, and if we see Jesus as the source of life and all that is good, then we have to admit Jesus is incredibly generous to those who have worshiped and lived here for 90 years. We have been given all we need to live, love, and serve our neighbors, as we serve one another in ministry. We lack nothing, even the sanctuary we are in was built by members who cut down trees, operated a saw mill to get the lumber needed, and used all the skills God had given them to put this sanctuary together. We have been given much to use for ministry and mission here in northern Minnesota.

And no matter what we think, what we see when look at the news whether broadcast or in print, Jesus the Son of the living God, is at work in this world, our Messiah uses you and me as he used those who went before us, the cloud of witnesses who surround us. Jesus uses even us who confess him one minute and betray him in the next, even as Peter did, even as Jesus used Paul who persecuted the church before being transformed by Jesus into the apostle to the Gentiles. Jesus has chosen us, this congregation, he draws us to himself and equips us for ministry to the saints.

Brothers and sisters, someone needs your witness, someone needs your ministry of presence, someone needs words of encouragement and wisdom, someone needs your generosity. Someone needs you to show Jesus at work in you, in others. We stand in Caesarea Philippi and we confess Jesus as Lord, and like those who went before us, we stand on the rock of Christ and the gates of hades shall not prevail!

AMEN