

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We are called Christians for a reason: we follow Christ; we believe in Christ; Jesus Christ is our God and our Lord; He is our Savior from sin and death; He gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation. I don't know why it's so hard to bear witness to this faith and not just some generic god. I hear the generic confession all the time. "What makes you a Christian?" "I believe in God." That doesn't make you a Christian. It makes you a Theist, but not a Christian.

Christians are those who have Jesus Christ foremost in mind as they think on God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whom we know because Jesus reveals Him to us. Christians trust in Jesus "*who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*" Christians look to Jesus, who "*being found in human form, ... humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" Christians worship Jesus, whom "*God [the Father] has highly exalted ... and bestowed ... the name that is above every name.*" Christians bow the knee "*at the name of Jesus*" and their "*tongue[s] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Phil. 2:6-11).

If someone asks you that simple question, "What makes you a Christian?", give them this simple creedal answer supplied by St. Paul: "I confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord." If they ask for more, tell them of God's Son who came in the likeness of men; tell them of the God-man who ascended a cross to die for sinful men. If they ask for even more, you've got the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds to help you ... or invite them to come to Zion where they can hear all about Jesus every Sunday.

For Christians believe, teach, and confess a whole lot more — that was just the elevator pitch. If it were otherwise, why do we have years of Junior catechesis classes? Why weeks of Adult instruction? Why ongoing Adult Bible classes?

Of course, we Christians gather together — we're told not to neglect it (Heb. 10:25). We gather around the preaching of God's Word and the Sacraments. That's "the congregation of saints" (Augsburg Confession, VII:1); that's the "holy Christian church" (Apostles' Creed).

And one of the things we confess about the church is that it is apostolic. Again, in the words of the apostle Paul, the church is "*the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone*" (Eph. 2:19-20). Thus, in the Nicene Creed, we confess "I believe in one holy Christian and **apostolic** Church."

And so, today, we remember two apostles, two men sent out with an apostolic message for the Church: Peter and Paul, sent out with a unified message — not one for

the Jews and another for the Gentiles, though Paul *“had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised.”* It was not, “well, the Jews, being the chosen people of God, sons of Abraham according to the flesh, Jews are saved by their works of the law; the Gentiles, on the other hand, are saved by grace through faith.” No! They had one message.

You know well what Peter confessed: Jesus is *“the Christ, the Son of the living God,”* something revealed to him by the *“Father who is in heaven”* Himself. And as we heard, Paul taught the same: *“Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* This confession is the Rock upon which Jesus told Peter that He would build His church.

Moreover, Peter told the Jerusalem Council: *“God ... [gave the Gentiles] the Holy Spirit just as he did to us [Jews], and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ... we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”* And you know well how Paul preached. He told the Galatian Christians: *“We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we [Jews] also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified”* (Gal. 2:15-16). Two apostles with one message, one confession.

For even as the church is apostolic, it is also one ... *“one body”* (1 Cor. 12:12). Peter had to be taught that *“God shows no partiality”* ... that *“in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him”* (Acts 10:34-35). And Paul taught similarly — *“just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit”* (1 Cor. 12:12-13).

Fellow Christians, let us repent of all the ways we try — especially today — to divide ourselves ... by race or ethnicity, by sex, by age, by politics, by power dynamics, etc. Paul says to all of these, it *“makes no difference to me”*; more than that, it makes no difference to God; *“God shows no partiality,”* and neither should we.

That doesn't mean that “anything goes” in the church. The Jerusalem Council put some very modest demands on the Gentiles: *“abstain from the things polluted by idols,”* not because an idol really is anything, but for the sake of a brother whose conscience is weak (1 Cor. 8:4ff); abstain *“from sexual immorality”*; abstain from *“what has been strangled, and from blood”* (Acts 15:20). We hold the Ten commandments before people's eyes, not that we are saved by them, but that these

help us measure how we're doing in seeking to live righteous lives as people who are "*in Christ*" (Gal. 3:28), who have been made new "*in Christ*" (2 Cor. 5:17).

But the church must be a place where people with all kinds of external differences gather together as one, as one body united in one Spirit, with one hope in our one Lord, confessing one faith — the apostolic faith — in our one God, joined through our one baptism, and united together at the Lord's table to eat of His body sacrificed and drink of His blood shed once for all.

It is amazing this single-minded, unambiguous message of Jesus, of Peter, Paul, and all the apostles — that Jesus Christ and His Gospel is the rock upon which the Church is built. Paul calls Christ "*the cornerstone*" (Eph. 2:20), and Peter calls Him "*the living stone, rejected by men but chosen and precious in God's sight*" (1 Pet. 2:4), "*a chosen and precious cornerstone*" (1 Pet. 2:6).

This is what we all have in common, what we hold dear ... our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, to be sure there are always those who try to come in and mess things up, erect barriers that take away our freedom, require new laws that must be followed to be saved. It was so in Peter and Paul's day, with those who wanted to require circumcision and the keeping of laws of Moses for salvation. But no! Peter came to Paul's defense. And Paul had to remind Peter of this when Peter's actions in Galatia didn't match His confession (Gal. 2:11-14). The Gentiles are not to be yoked with laws that not even the Jews could keep. Gentiles' salvation is the same way as the Jews' — through the grace of the Lord Jesus. Jew and Gentile alike have been set free from the tyranny of the law by Christ as Paul would tell the Galatian Gentile Christians: "*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery*" (Gal. 5:1).

Today, we remember two apostles, not perfect men — Peter was a denier of Christ and Paul a persecutor of Christ and His church. Not by their works were they saved, and neither are we. They were saved by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that was their apostolic message to their hearers; that is their apostolic message to us. Jesus is the Christ, the only name under heaven by which we must be saved. Baptized into Him, we are in Christ by faith; we are sons of God and heirs of eternal life. We "*are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession,*" with the privilege of proclaiming "*the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once [we] were not a people, but now [we] are God's people*" — we are the Church. "*[O]nce [we] had not received mercy, but now [we] have received mercy*" (1 Pet. 2:9-10) — and through this mercy, forgiveness, life, salvation, hope — through Christ, through faith in Him. Thanks be to God for this apostolic message and for our hearing with faith.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.