

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

When we make confession of faith about Jesus— do you notice this? — we confess two parts. We confess who Jesus is, and we confess what Jesus did.

That's the way it is in the Apostles' Creed which we confessed today: "And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." That confesses who He is. It's like we're answering Jesus' question to the disciples that you talked about last week, the question that Jesus asked them shortly before our Gospel today: "*who do you say that I am?*" (Matt. 16:15). As you heard last week, Peter answered for the disciples, saying "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matt. 16:16).

And in the Nicene Creed, which we ordinarily confess on Sundays, it's "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God." That part is very similar to the Apostles' Creed, just ordered a bit differently, and to Peter's confession.

"*Who do you say that I am?*" You might also remember that the Nicene Creed was addressing some false teachings about Jesus — confessions often include both what you confess and what you reject. So Jesus is, we confess, "begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God," that He is "of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made." And we reject that Jesus is created; He is "begotten, not made."

The disciples weren't dealing with the heretic Arians, so Peter's answer was both correct and sufficient. Jesus is "*the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" And Jesus commends Peter, though truly, the Father in heaven had to reveal it to him.

But remember, that's only part of our confession, and, if you will, that's only part of Jesus' purpose. Jesus had gotten His disciples to understand who He was. They would convey more details in their Gospels, too. Matthew and Luke would tell us that "*that which is conceived in [Mary] is from the Holy Spirit,*" (Matt. 1:20) as we confess, and that Mary bore Jesus as a virgin (Luke 1:34). John would tell us that the eternal Word was God, and that He would take on human flesh and dwell among us (John 1:14).

But there's the second part that we confess, and so "*From that time Jesus began to show his disciples*" what He came to do. He began to show them "*that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed*" Peter objected immediately: "*Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.*"

I don't think Peter even heard Jesus finish His words. I don't think he listened to Jesus say what the consummating act would be: "*and on the third day be raised,*" so firm was Peter's conviction that the Christ just shouldn't be talking about suffering and cross. That's not appropriate for God's anointed. It should be

comfort and not suffering, Peter thought, praise and not scorn, glory and not cross. But this is man's way of thinking, not God's.

Thus Peter is put to shame as are all who try to divert Jesus from His objective: to redeem mankind by His blood, to save mankind by His cross, to justify mankind by His grace as He laid down His life for the world. "*Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me,*" Jesus rebuked Peter. A σκάνδαλον, an offense, for the love of God required Jesus to go to the cross. It required that He be lifted up unto death for your sins.

It was necessary, and not for Him, but for us. All this was necessary for the ultimate good of mankind, for by suffering and death comes our redemption, by these comes forgiveness of our sins, by these we have life. To be sure, what those elders and chief priests and scribes intended was evil—to put to death an innocent man by suffering and cross. But God took that evil and used it to our good: to save fallen mankind.

And lest the folly and weakness of the proclamation of the cross become an offense to us, let us listen all the way to the end; for after "*be killed*" comes "*and on the third day be raised.*" Thus we confess it in our creeds, too, that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven," and so forth. And the Nicene Creed makes sure we know it — it's "for us men and for our salvation."

The true Christian confession is not just that Jesus is Lord, but that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). And He did it for us. That is, that Jesus was "*delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*" (Rom. 4:25). And more than that, but "*since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep,*" that is, those who died having believed and been baptized, like Kinley today—those who lost their lives in Jesus the crucified, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised up again to walk in newness of life.

What a wondrous thing we witnessed again this morning: "a new birth by which [Kinley was] freed from all the devil's tyranny, loosed from sin, death, and hell, and [became a child] of life, [an heir] of all the gifts of God ..." as Luther put it. But that also means that we have burdened Kinley along with us "with ... a mighty and lifelong enemy."

And that means that the life of a Christian is not one void of crosses. Quite the contrary, Kinley was marked with the cross, with the rest of us. She was called to self-denial and taking up her cross, and, in this way, following Jesus.

This call to a life of Christian humility, of denying ourselves, can be a difficult thing in this hedonistic world that encourages us to indulge ourselves with every

pleasure. Jesus tells us that we should expect trial and tribulation, persecution and cross, just for being a Christian. Christian florists, bakers, printers, judges, preschools, etc., are all under assault for confessing Christ. Powerful people pledging to destroy evil Christians for their so-called hate. Praise the Lord. Jesus tells us that we are saved not by gaining the favor of the world, but by losing our life for His sake. And, in this way, Jesus tells us that we are blessed—we are being counted as sons and heirs. We are being refined and purified like gold and silver by the fires of our crosses.

Of course, we witnessed quite a disaster this past week. Now I don't want you to misunderstand me. I'm not saying that Hurricane Harvey was either God's punishment for depraved people or a trial that people suffered for being a Christian — no, that rain fell *"on the just and on the unjust"* (Matt. 5:45). But it's true that as Christians went forth to help their fellow Americans, they did so in spite of the fact that they were going to experience trial and cross. They were being compelled by the love of Christ. St. Paul says it this way, *"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised"* (2 Cor. 5:14-15)—there's losing lives for the sake of Christ. And many of the volunteers I saw on the news were Christians. Sometimes they said it explicitly; sometimes you saw them in prayer or asking for prayer; sometimes you heard their song of praise and deliverance sound forth. The light of Christ was shining through them as they took up their crosses and followed Him. God grant us zeal to do likewise for our neighbors in Texas, Louisiana, and closer to home.

And it's not that we choose our crosses. Who could have foreseen this opportunity to deny oneself and follow Jesus? No one would have wished it. It presented itself, and Christians took it up, though hard and painful. And the holy writer reminds us that we are *"trained by [such crosses]"* (Heb. 12:11). St. Paul tells us similarly, we Christians *"rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us"* (Rom. 5:3-5).

So rejoice that Jesus is the Christ who suffered cross and death for your salvation. Confess it boldly. Take up the crosses that come your way as you follow Jesus and rejoice in them. And when the Son of Man comes with His angels in His glory, He will gather you to His throne and speak the words of His testament: *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you..."* (Matt. 25:34).

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