

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

In the season of Epiphany, we met Andrew and Peter, James and John, Philip and Nathanael, who became disciples of Jesus. We heard how when Jesus called Peter and Andrew who were casting their nets, they left them immediately and followed after Jesus. Similarly, Jesus called James and John who were mending their nets, and they, too, immediately got out of the boat and followed Jesus. Little did they know what lay ahead of them.

These men were all called immediately by Jesus — that’s a little different use of the word immediately. They were called directly by Jesus ... without mediation. Not so you. How did you become a disciple? When did you begin to follow Him? You’d be right if you answered, “When I was baptized.” You know that Jesus would later say, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matt. 28:19).

Baptism makes disciples. It probably happened for most of us when we were infants. That’s when I was baptized ... when I was 20 days old. I don’t remember it, but I know it happened. Parents bear witness to it; the church has records; we have baptismal certificates. To be sure, some were baptized when they were older, teenagers, perhaps, or fully adults. It matters not. By this sacrament commanded by Jesus, we become His disciples. And what was true of the first disciples, can often be said about us. Little did we know what lay ahead of us.

The Twelve disciples of Jesus would spend the next three years in Jesus’ classroom, hearing His instruction, listening to parables and explanations. They would witness miracles of healing and feeding and power over creation, even over the forces of evil. They would learn just who this Rabbi was. And at the end of that instruction, they were asked to confess.

That’s what we have before us today. Jesus asked the disciples — all of them: “[W]ho do you say that I am?” Actually, Jesus began with an easier question: “Who do [other] people say that I am?” In that, they all chimed in: “John the Baptist; ... Elijah; ... [another] one of the prophets.” That others might call Jesus a prophet made sense. He taught with authority, like the prophets of old, not like the scribes (Mark 1:27; Matt. 7:29). Jesus did fill a prophetic office.

But, of course, Jesus was more, and He asked His disciples to confess it. “[W]ho do you say that I am?” It was a more difficult question, and the disciples may have been a bit fearful, after all, Jesus had scolded them before: “Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?” I fed the five thousand, and the four thousand, with baskets left over! “Do you not yet understand?” (Mark 8:17-21).

But on this day, Jesus was giving the disciples another opportunity to analyze what they had been hearing and seeing and to make a confession of their own, and this time, Peter mustered up the courage to answer. As a spokesman for the Twelve, he answered: “*You are the Christ.*” Peter was right! Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of David, the King.

Our experience is not much different. The years after baptism are years of growth in the Word of God, and of instruction — catechesis, we call it, of “*teaching them to observe all that [Jesus] commanded*” (Matt. 28:20). And those years culminate in calling upon our catechumens to make a confession. That’s what confirmation is all about. It’s not a graduation; our young confirmands confess for themselves what was confessed for them as infants by parents and sponsors and the congregation. “Do you renounce the devil? I do renounce him!” “And all his works? I do renounce them!” “And all his ways? I do renounce them!” “Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty? Yes, I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son? Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, ....” “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? Yes, I believe in the Holy Spirit, ....” All this is confessed personally by the confirmands.

Indeed, our confirmands’ confession is more complete than Peter’s in the Gospel. Peter confessed who Jesus was — the Christ — but not what Jesus did. The disciples had much more to learn at this point, and Jesus began to instruct them about that. He told them plainly: “*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.*” That is exactly what we just confessed in the Second Article of the Nicene Creed: our “Lord Jesus Christ ... for us men and for our salvation ... was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures.” And in the Apostles’ Creed, we confess: “Jesus Christ ... suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead.”

Now, Peter wanted no part of *that* Jesus. He began to rebuke Jesus, but he had become Satan’s mouthpiece, and Jesus wasn’t going to be deterred by that deceiver. He rebuked Peter, and he did that quite plainly, too. “*Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.*”

Yes, it was the things of God to send His own Son into our sinful flesh, that He might bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. It was the things of God to offer up His own Son as an atoning sacrifice for a sinful world, dying for us while we were still sinners. It was the things of God to raise up His own Son from death, a banner

of victory to give hope to a “*people walking in darkness*” (Isa. 9:2 — that we are saved by His life. It was the things of God, planned even before the world was made, to adopt us “*as sons through Jesus Christ,*” having chosen us in Christ “*that we should be holy and blameless before him*” (Eph. 1:4-5). It was the things of God to do all this and to have Jesus and His disciples to proclaim it, that we might understand that He is “*just,*” and He is “*the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*” (Rom. 3:26).

This is what Peter and the rest of the disciples had yet to learn. Jesus would tell them a couple more times, and they would get bogged down in the things of men: pride, ambition, fear, betrayal, denial. But then they would witness Jesus going through the dreadful events of His passion and the incredible events of His exaltation. And they would go on to confess that, too, and proclaim it — like Peter did on Pentecost. “[*T*]his Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2:23-24). “*This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses*” (Acts 2:32). “*Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified*” (Acts 2:36).

And they would learn, besides making the good confession, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. It means self-denial. It means suffering for the sake of Christ and His Church. It means following Jesus when it is not popular or profitable. Arrested, imprisoned, beaten, stoned, betrayed, persecuted — they took up their cross. And most of them lost their lives for Jesus’ sake.

We must learn it, too. To be sure, we make the good confession. We confess Jesus before men. We are asked: “Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?” And we promise: “I do, by the grace of God.” Again, we are asked: “Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?” And again, we promise: “I do, by the grace of God” (Rite of Confirmation, *Lutheran Service Book*). But those promises are often sorely tested in the days that follow ... tested by our own suffering for the sake of Christ.

Truly, we need God’s grace to stand. We need the strength of His word and sacraments, that we may remain faithful in the midst of suffering. We need God’s word to remind us that our suffering is not the Lord abandoning us in time of need, but is the Lord disciplining us, as Jesus said, “*Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline*” (Rev. 3:19). “*It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons,*” the writer to the Hebrews writes (Heb. 12:7). The Lord is

refining us by our suffering: *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word”* (Ps. 119:57). St. Paul said: *“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”* ... given us by Word and Sacrament.

Our Lutheran hymns often reflect this truth — penned by men like Martin Schalling, the author of our Hymn of the Day, and Paul Gerhardt, called a “theologian sifted in Satan’s sieve” — these texts are born out of suffering. We sang in Schalling’s text earlier: “Let no false doctrine me beguile, Let Satan not my soul defile. Give strength and patience unto me To bear my cross and follow Thee.” And Gerhardt’s text will be on our lips shortly — pay attention to these words: “1. Why should cross and trial grieve me? Christ is near With His cheer; Never will He leave me. Who can rob me of the heaven That God’s Son For me won When His life was given? 2. When life’s troubles rise to meet me, Though their weight May be great, They will not defeat me. God, my loving Savior, sends them; He who knows All my woes Knows how best to end them.”

As we sing them, their words become ours, their confession ours, their steadfastness ours. Therefore, confessing the true faith, let us bear our cross and follow Jesus with confidence, being sure *“that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 8:38–39).

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