

The Confession of St. Peter

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Lessons for The week of prayer for Christian unity

Acts 4:8-13 - Peter confesses Jesus as the source of power to heal

I Corinthians 10:1-5 - Paul speaks of the water-given rock that was Christ

Matthew 16:13-19

- Why is the word "confession" used? We think of a confession as an "admission" or something reluctantly acknowledged that we would have preferred not to say.
- He confesses in response to Jesus' question - is that harder or easier than a confession with threat of reprisal?
- Confesses that Jesus is the "messiah" - what is the messiah, the Christ? "the anointed King of Yahweh"? an eschatological hope for a different future? a reform of existing Israelite culture and cult? a suffering figure? a suffering and dying figure?
- Confesses "the Son of the Living God" - and what is a "son of God" other than by pointing to Jesus?

In the "third quest" for the historical Jesus, we seem to be given an epidemic of reductionistic portraits of Jesus: the talking head of the Jesus seminar, the itinerant cynic philosopher, the otherworldly spiritualist, a completely eschatological figure, a totally non-eschatological figure, a social reformer, a feminist advocate of Sophia, a reforming Jew, etc. Those left who think the gospels might tell us something reliable about Jesus and that Jesus should be described as "messiah" or "son of God" seem to be few - or at least that isn't what they're writing. Does this trend mirror the person in the pew's issues about Jesus?

- "on this rock" – what is the rock? Peter the person, or upon the confession itself?
- "church" - used here, Matt. 18:17 and no place else in the gospels. Does Jesus mean "the loyal people of God"? Could apostolic succession be inferred from anything else Jesus says about the nature of authority and power in the Kingdom of God? Compare Matt. 18:19's grant of power to "two of you on earth" who agree about something.
- Must we slide from this confession to what comes after it? Can we include what follows without undermining the importance of this confession.
- What does confessing Christ mean today - in terms of 1) confessing to God, and 2) confessing to our society?

- We know so much about Peter's future. It is interesting to read that future in light of this confession. Peter, of the rebuke of Jesus and the denial, yes, but there is more. Peter is also the powerful sermon at Pentecost, the healing of the beggar, speaking with boldness to Jewish authorities, bringing judgment on Ananias and Sapphira, speaking before the Sanhedrin, and, perhaps most critically, his role in the conversion of Cornelius that justifies and sets in motion the witness to the Gentiles - could all this be seen as flowing from his continuing reflection on the meaning of the confession as he grows into fuller knowledge of the Christ.

"In fact, there was and could be no church until the resurrection witness became the triumphant climax and interpreting center of the gospel." F. V. Filson, Peter, IDB