

March 15, 2015
Peter
Peter's Confession
Mark 8:27-33

Opening Words: This is sermon number four in my five-part sermon series on *Peter*. I chose to look at Peter for a simple reason. The amount of information on Peter is impressive. It is hard to look at a single page of the Gospels and not find his name. Within those stories, we see Peter's spiritual progress. During this season of Lent, I hope you are making some spiritual progress too.

This morning we find ourselves in the Gospel of Mark. Many have called it Peter's gospel. The author of this book was John Mark, who was an associate of Peter. The information was not dictated to him by Peter. Instead, it came from Peter's sermons. Mark listened and accurately preserved the information. Of the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, it is the earliest. It was written about the year AD 68. That fact is important because it appears the authors of Matthew and Luke used Mark as a foundational piece to expand their gospels. (John did his own thing.) The basic storyline and stories in Matthew and Luke were first found in Mark. Our scripture reading for this morning is Mark 8:27-33. Let me call this message, *Peter's Confession*.

Mark 8:27-33 ²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

²⁸ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

²⁹ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

History tells us the Eiffel Tower was built in 1889 for an international exposition by architect Alexander Gustave Eiffel. When the citizens of Paris first saw it they were shocked. Many called it monstrous and demanded it to be torn down as soon as possible. Yet, from the moment the architect first conceived it, he took pride in her and loyally defended her. He knew his creation was destined for greatness. He was right! Today, it is one of the architectural wonders of the modern world and stands as the primary landmark of the French capitol.

In many ways the church is like the Eiffel Tower. Lent is a time to be honest, so let us be honest! There are many people in our world who just don't like the church. If you are part of a church today, then you had better be prepared for a new form of Christian persecution. The world is no longer persecuting us with wild animals, but they are persecuting us with words. There are many who have strong feelings against the church. They see us as a group who had a glorious past, but a fading future. In our post-modern world, many wish we would stop talking and simply go away. But we are not going to go away, because we know better, because we know Jesus. The Master, the architect of the church, knows his creation is still destined for greatness. If you want to be part of a great church with a dynamic future, say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves this morning in the eighth chapter of Mark. These words are vital; they are the watershed of the entire Gospel. You know the story, it all began with two questions. Jesus asked the questions as he and the disciples were traveling to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. The first question was, who do people say I am? They answered honestly with an impressive list. Some say John the Baptist, who died in the previous chapter. Some say Elijah, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. Some unidentified prophets were also mentioned. The answers to that question are interesting, but they are overshadowed by the next question, "who do you say I am"? That question should not have been a surprise, but it was. Away from Jesus, the disciples must have questioned his true identity. Each one of the twelve had an answer, but only one spoke up, Peter. He answered, "You are the Christ." With those words, everything changed. He answered the question correctly, but he also answered incorrectly. He had the right word - Christ. The problem is, he didn't have the correct understanding of the word, "Christ".

His definition or understanding of the word Christ was completely wrong. I have said this many times. Peter's understanding of the word Christ was political in nature. Never forget, they lived in a politically dominated land. Approximately 70 years earlier, Rome conquered that land. Jesus's generation never knew liberty. They had only dreamed of it. Tired of foreign domination, they longed for the day when they would live up to their title, God's chosen people. It was their belief that God would send someone, who would lead them to victory. The Hebrew word for that person was "Messiah". The Greek word for that person was "Christ". Connect the dots with me. Peter is saying he believed Jesus was going to lead them to political independence. That is why Peter cut off the ear of the guard at Jesus's arrest. He was ready to get the revolution started! Let me say this bluntly. Peter was wrong. Jesus didn't have a political bone in his body. Jesus was a spiritual king. He wanted to change the world one soul at a time, from the inside out. Matthew's version of this story adds this important line. He quotes Jesus as saying, "On this rock I will build my church." The rock is Peter's faith.

This morning, I want to look at three divine qualities that should exist in the church today. Jesus intended them to be there from the very beginning. Remember, Jesus is changing us from the inside out. Jesus didn't just teach to us, he modeled them for us.

Never forget, you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. That means you should be a little more like Jesus every day. Occasionally, I find these qualities here at Western Reserve from time to time. However, we still have some work to do. So if you are ready to look at Christ's church, say, "**Amen!**"

Live Life Unselfishly

Years ago, the Salvation Army was holding an international convention and their founder, Gen. William Booth, could not attend because of physical weakness. He cabled his convention message to them. It was one word. Do you know what that one word message was? OTHERS!

In Christ's church we live our lives unselfishly. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus told the crowds about the need to sacrifice. Then he went to the cross and showed us about sacrifice. Sacrifice is one of the key characteristics in the Christian lifestyle. In our congregations, there must be an element of sacrifice, living life unselfishly. William Temple said it best, "*The church is the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members.*"

One year Jackie Robinson's widow attended baseball's winter meetings. You know Jackie Robinson. He broke baseball's racial barrier when he played for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. He played ten years in the major leagues and had a lifetime batting average of .311. He helped the Dodgers win six National League pennants and the World Championship in 1955. He was voted into the baseball Hall of Fame in 1962. Some thought his widow would talk about racism. Others thought she would talk about Jackie's hard times in the major leagues. Still others thought she would talk about his baseball accomplishments. This is what she said, "*What you accomplish in athletics is not important. What you accomplish in business is not important. All that matters is what you do for others. A life is not important except for the impact it has on other people's lives.*" Christ expects his church to live unselfishly. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Love People Unconditionally

Years ago, I received a phone call from a college student. You may know him. His name is Matt. The first thing he said to me was, "Russ, I want to apologize to you." I said, "For what?" He said, "The only church I have ever known is Western Reserve. I really didn't think our church was so great. I have discovered Western Reserve isn't so bad." I said, "Matt, what happened? Tell me your story." In one of his classes he had to interview a minister. He wanted to find a church while he was in college, so he visited his local United Methodist Church." He said, "When I walked into the church I thought it would be like Western Reserve." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, we come to church, you make fun of us, we laugh, talk about Jesus, pray and go home feeling good." I said, "What happened there?" He said, "Well, I walked into the church and discovered I was forty years younger than everyone else. I was identified as a visitor with my girlfriend and some lady took me to the preacher. The preacher looked at me

and said, 'I don't know the custom in your church, but here we seat ourselves.' He said, "No one talked to us the rest of the morning." I said, "Well, Matt, let's be honest. You are not the best looking person! Maybe your beard frightened them?" We laughed, but that discussion made me sad. I have known Matt for a long time. I am the only pastor he has ever known, so I feel qualified to say he is one of the finest Christian young men I have ever known. Matt was a victim of conditional love. He was a young stranger in an old person's church.

In Christ's church we love people unconditionally. Jesus loved unconditionally. He did care if you were a Jew or a Gentile. He didn't care if you were a man or a woman. He did care if you were an adult or a child. He didn't care if you were sick or whole. He didn't care if you were a victim or a victor. Jesus loved everyone unconditionally. And for that reason Jesus expects his church to love unconditionally. Thomas à Kempis said, "*Whoever loves much, does much.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Trust God Unreservedly

When Winston Churchill was a small boy, his family invited family friends over. The children went for a swim in the family pool. Young Winston went too far out and started to drown. He cried for help and a gardener jumped in and saved him. His parents, deeply grateful to the gardener, asked what they could do to reward him. He hesitated, then said, "I wish my son could go to college someday and become a doctor." "We'll pay his way," replied Churchill's parents. Years later, when Sir Winston was Prime Minister of England, he was stricken with pneumonia. Greatly concerned, the king summoned the best physician who could be found to the bedside of the ailing leader. That doctor was Sir Alexander Fleming, the developer of penicillin. He was also the son of that gardener who had saved Winston from drowning as a boy! Later Churchill said, "*Rarely has one man owed his life twice to the same person.*"

Here is the good news for today. You will not have to be saved twice, once is good enough. Jesus saved you when he hung on the cross. He didn't just save you to live another day in this world. He saved you to live for eternity in heaven. In Christ's church we trust God unreservedly. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Let me end with a question.

It is the same question Jesus asked the disciples. It is an excellent question. Everyone must answer it. Jesus asks us all, "Who do you say I am?" There is only one right answer. The answer is the Christ. If your answer is correct, then you are part of Christ's church. In Christ's church we **live life unselfishly**. In Christ's church we **love unconditionally**. In Christ's church we **trust God unreservedly**. If you know Jesus as the Christ, then say, "**Amen!**"