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Sermon for Sunday, August 21, 2011

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 22: 15-16, 19-23
Matthew 16: 13-20
Romans 11: 33-36

Sermon Title: "Fully-Charged Christians"

Sermon Topic: Confessing Christ

Sermon Purpose: To teach the necessity of confessing the Lordship of Jesus Christ at all times; necessary for us, and for the church to survive.

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Sermon Prayer: God of love and light, grant me the Wisdom to use Your Words and the courage to speak Your Truth. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Today, the church suffers from three things: from triviality, from uncertainty, and from self-satisfaction. This is true, whether we're referring to a local congregation, any specific denomination, or the universal Church of Jesus Christ.

We members permit the trivialities of methods of worship, concern over finances, popularity of persons, and man-made laws to cloud over the primary concerns we **should** be facing. We allow them to become determinants of our ministry. And, we lose sight of our original **goals**, of the primary **focus** of our ministry, and of what **our** commission has been.

When this happens, our reason for existence becomes confused. We no longer remember the source of our strength. The Christ we profess has no **real** value in our lives, and so that message of grace loses its **importance**; its **power**. We become milque-toast, namby-pamby, social Christians who bend with the winds of social change, moral decline, and local popularity. We no longer know (or **care** to know) the foundational truths of the Bible; or the price of redemption through actual **pain** and **blood** and **tears**.

We become satisfied with the way things have happened in the past, and the way they are at present; so we feel there is no need to search ourselves (**or** the Scriptures) to find new ways to minister to tomorrow's needs of the world around us without weakening or deserting the former ministry of our church.

Now, before we become too hard on ourselves, before we start beating ourselves with guilt and weeping, wailing, gnashing our teeth, groveling and growling in despair; let's look at the company we're in.

To whom did our Lord ask His question? Not just **Peter!** Matthew says, " ... He asked His **disciples**." Not just the twelve **apostles**, but **all** those who had been following Him and listening to Him, since He fed the multitude at the Sea of Galilee. Some of them had been with Him since He arrived at Tyre and Sidon. And some, since before that!

Here was a man - the Son of the living God - Who was absolutely **alone** only twice in His life; once when He arose early in the morning to go out of town to pray, and once when He prayed - alone -



in the Garden at Gethsemane. The rest of His ministering life was in the company of at least eleven others; and usually there were fifty, a hundred, a thousand, or more!

And he asks, "... who do **you** say that I am?"

And only **one** answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Only **one**! Simon Bar-Jona! The one whose name Jesus changed to Peter - Petros - Petra - the Rock; firm, strong, unswerving in the light of all the differing opinions that surrounded him.

It took a lot of **guts** to say it, and Jesus **knew** it. If it was true, it was enough to blow the lid off everything! If it **wasn't** true, you could get yourself literally **killed** for just **thinking** it! But Peter said it, **anyway**, and Jesus made for him the **only** beatitude He ever composed for a single individual. He said, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, by my Father Who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are **Peter**, and on this **rock** will I build my church, and (even) the powers of **death** shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you **bind** on earth shall be **bound** in heaven, and whatever you **loose** on earth shall be **loosed** in heaven."

When Peter said, "You are the **Christ** - the **Messiah** - he meant one whom God had appointed and **anointed** to speak and to **do** what **God** gave Him to do and to speak. This was a **sensational** statement in Palestine! It was tantamount to saying, "The choir of The Linden Presbyterian Church is the only group of people who has the ability and the God-given right and **duty** to sing His praises. **All** others are just flapping their gums as noisy gongs or clanging cymbals, because God has **not** appointed **them** as spokespeople for the music and beauty of God's love."

We may like to **think** things are like that, but we **know** it's not true. There **are** one or two others!

But, you see, in **Peter's** case, it was **different**! He **knew** that Jesus - at that time - **was** the only one. The prophets had come and gone. Jesus was the **only** one. And no matter **what** happened; that thought, that **certainty**, that **message HAD** to be expressed!

Today, that statement is not the least **bit** sensational. So we miss that unparalleled excitement which Peter, as a first century Jew, would put into that single word: "Christ."

Every Christian era has put Jesus in the top categories, whatever they may be. For Peter, the highest possible category was "Messiah"; alone, unique, glorious, incomparable: Jesus was **all** this for Simon Peter's faith.

Now, where does that leave us - those namby-pamby, uncertain, triviality-ridden, self-satisfied, acquiescent, Sunday Christians? It leaves us in the company of the other disciples who must still make answer to the Lord's question. It leaves us as the **Church** - God's question. The church is not born in a human proposal, but in the divine interrogation: "Who do you say that I am?" The very minute Peter made his response the Church was established. The very minute we offer a prayer, sing a hymn, or open the Bible to read, think, feel, know, and say "Jesus is the Christ," our Church is established and we are charged with the commission to go into all the world and teach, preach, and baptize in the name of Christ.

When Peter made **his** statement, it was - for him - a time of emotion and conviction. His faith was strong and sure. He had just seen another miracle. He knew the **consequences**, but he **had** to say it, **anyway**. He was so **emotionally** charged that if he **didn't** say it, he knew he was going to **burst**!

This was one of the few times Jesus was overwhelmed by the insight of the disciple. He was - Himself - still fighting His way through the cloudy, dark riddles of His identity and destiny. Like **any** man growing up, He had searched for Himself through the forests and the deserts of His mind. But, **unlike** other men, He had to go **beyond** finding Himself as a man. His visions and epiphanies were soul-shaking **experiences** that any mortal would avoid, if given the choice. There had been a sharp turn of events, and now Jesus **knew** He would **have** to take His path into the whole dark side of the future. He could **not** remain self-satisfied with His ministry. There **had** to be more because **He** was more than most people expected.

Well, He took that path and He shed light into **every** future. Now, it's **our** turn to answer His question, "Who do **you** say that I am?" Will we answer as a people fully-charged with a duty and with a responsibility to carry God's message through the next Church School year, through the next Church



calendar year, through the rest of our life together as a community of faith? Will we answer as a group of believers with fully charged emotions that find it imperative to share the Good News - make that **Great** News - with others, in whatever way it takes? Will we answer as Presbyterians, whose tradition has been one of being both emotional **and** orderly? Will we answer as Peter did? Or will we let someone else answer, this time? We'll take the **next** question!

My friends, this is the **only** question of faith that's ever going to face us. And, all **eternity** is determined by our response. And, like it or not, we are fully charged to answer!

I pray - no, I **know** - we will answer as "Christians;" true, enthusiastic, eager, loving, and caring.

Let us pray:

Almighty and loving God, we give thanks that You gave Your Son on our behalf. Be with us, guide us, and strengthen us, now, as we carry His message of Your love, grace, peace,, and power in the face of all uncertainty and upheaval in our world. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

