

John the Baptist confessed Christ. Jesus says that anyone who confesses him before men, he will confess before his Father in heaven. So this is what the church does. The church confesses Christ. A church that doesn't have a confession is no church at all. We confess. This means that we speak the same thing. It is why we sing hymns together, recite the Creed together, listen to the Word together, and call upon God in prayer together. We agree. We agree that there is one God, the Father, his only begotten Son, and his eternal Spirit. We agree that he created the world in six days, made man, both male and female, in his image, and gives children as a blessing from the womb. We agree that the Son of God became a man, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, was obedient in the place of every sinner, died for the sins of the world, and was raised to declare us righteous in his sight. We agree that we receive forgiveness of sins only through faith in Jesus Christ, that our baptism into Christ is a washing of new birth and new life by the Holy Spirit. We agree that the bread and wine distributed from this altar are the true body and blood of Jesus given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. We agree and look forward together to the return of our Lord Jesus. We agree that God's Word is true. So we confess.

John the Baptist is given as an example for all of us. He is an example of one who confesses. Important people were sent by other important people to ask John, "Who are you?" John was being interrogated. They were pushing their weight around. They were priests. They had the authority to teach and practice the rituals in the temple. But who was John? Who does he think he is? Who gave him the right or authority to start this new ritual of washing people with water? Why is he baptizing?

Of course, John had the authority to do what he was doing. John was called by God. John's father, Zechariah, was a priest. The angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his wife, Elizabeth, who couldn't have any children, would have a child and that his name would be John. John would be sent in the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah. And under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Zechariah said to John, "You, my child, will be called the prophet of the most high." John had all the credentials. So how did John respond to them when they tried to pull rank on him? He simply said, "I am not the Christ."

What is John doing here? He is making it about Christ. They want to make it about John. But John denies himself, saying, "I am not." And by saying, "I am not the Christ," John is making it about Christ.

When the people of Israel told Samuel that they wanted a king to rule over them, Samuel took it personally at first. After all, they were essentially saying that they didn't want to depend on his leadership anymore. But the Lord said to Samuel, "They haven't rejected you; they've rejected me from being their King." God was telling Samuel, in other words, not to take it personally. It's not about Samuel. It was never about Samuel. It's about the Lord, the King, who was coming in the flesh. So it is with John. They are giving John a hard time about baptizing, questioning his authority and qualifications. But it's not about John. John knows that. It's about the Lord.

This brings to mind what Peter teaches us in his first epistle. He tells us to be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks us for the hope that is in us. And he tell us to do so with gentleness, reverence, and with a good conscience. The gentleness is what you show toward those who are confronting you about what you believe. You show humility and meekness toward them out of love and honor. Reverence is the fear and respect you have toward God who gives you the words to confess. And a good conscience is what you have in yourself. In your baptism, the blood of the crucified and risen Christ washes your conscience clean, allowing you to press on unshaken from what others are saying about you. You know

that the truth you confess is the truth that sets you free. It is the truth of Jesus Christ, the living God, whom you serve.

So John doesn't need to pull rank, even though he certainly has it from God. When they ask him if he is Elijah, he says, "I am not." When they ask him if he is the Prophet, he says, "No." John continues to deny himself. But he isn't deflecting or changing the subject. He isn't being slick and sneaky, as if it doesn't matter whether God actually called him. He isn't denying his office. No, he is confessing in his office.

Let's say, for example, that someone questions you about how you are raising your children. Of course, you know that you are the child's dad or mom. You are the parent. God gave you the authority to raise your child. He has called you to this office and work. Who are they to question this? Let's say, for example, that someone questions my authority as the pastor in some way. Again, I should know that God called me through his church to do this work. I should be certain of this, just as you should be certain of whatever work God has given you to do. But what should you focus on? You should focus on the true substance of what God called you to do. Focus on raising your children to know and confess their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Focus on doing your work in an honest way, knowing that you are serving not merely men, but the Lord Christ himself. As a servant of Christ, knowing that he has been called by him to prepare his way, John doesn't dwell on the bare fact that he's been called. Much more, he focuses on what God has called him to do.

So when they continue to press him to tell them who he is, John is eager to tell them. "I am a voice," he says, "calling in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way for the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." The priests and Levites sent by the Pharisees are focused on the fact that they were sent by the Pharisees. They make sure John knows that they need to go back and report to those who sent them. But John focuses on what the Bible says. As far as ranks and credentials go, John far outranks them. Yet, he is content simply to call himself a voice. He is the voice prophesied by the prophet Isaiah. He is sent to prepare the way for the Lord. He is eager to tell them this. He isn't ashamed of his calling. And he shows this by fulfilling what he was called to do.

When they keep pressing him about why he is baptizing, he again makes it not about himself but about Christ. "I baptize with water," he says. "There is standing among you someone you don't know, the one who is coming after me. I'm not good enough to untie his sandal strap." John affirms what he is doing. He isn't sneaking around or talking in circles. He understands the weight of his work. He isn't just playing around when he is baptizing with water, just like you aren't playing around when you discipline your children, do your job, and serve those who are in your care. God equips you for this work. God calls you to these tasks. You should be confident of this and not deny it. But above all you should know that whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, you do it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

People will give you a hard time about what God has called you to do. People will challenge you about why you say that Jesus is the only way to heaven. They will take issue with your strange stance against the current trends of the culture. They might question why you wait until you're married before you share your body in an intimate way. They are often put off or outraged by your attitude toward marriage and the gift of children. They might be offended that you won't participate with them in their idol worship. Whatever it is, people will challenge you on what you say and do. But you don't need to be anxious about this. You should know that your fellow Christians are being interrogated for the same

things all around the world. And when you simply confess, when you don't make it about yourself but about Christ and his Word, then you can know that you are speaking the same thing as your fellow believers in Christ.

This is a joyful thing. So as Paul tells us in his epistle to the Philippians, rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord always. This is what you are doing when you confess Christ. You are finding your joy in him. When you rejoice in him, then you can have peace. This is the peace, which Christ earned for you by his bitter suffering and death. It is peace with God who does not count your sins against you. By this very Word, which he has put in his ears and on your mouth, he continues to dwell with you and even in you with his peace.

This is why you can rejoice. This is why you can confess Christ without being anxious or worried about anything. Because the Lord is near. John says, "There is standing among you someone you don't know." John isn't afraid to confess, because his Lord is near. And Jesus promises that he is with us in his Word and sacraments. This means that he is with you in everything you do. When you are striving to raise your children, put an honest day's work in, or answer your neighbor who asks you why you live the way you live, you don't make it about you, no matter how much others want to do this. No, you make it about Christ and his Word, and you can be certain that he is with you. He sets a table before you even in the midst of your enemies. This is how you are able to confess. And you can have peace in this confession. It's the peace only faith can grasp and only God can give. So even if those who challenge you never understand why you still confess what you confess, don't lose heart. This peace of God surpasses all understanding. Amen.