

In Jesus' name. Amen.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, **"Who are you?"** He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ... "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." ... "I baptize with water, but among you stands One you do not know, even He who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In the 8th commandment, the Lord says, **"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."**

Dr. Martin Luther explains saying, *"We should fear and love God so that we do not lie about, betray, or slander your neighbor,*

but excuse him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything. (Small Catechism Explanation)

But is it only our neighbor that the Lord does not want us lying about?

No, He desires us to be truthful about all things, including about ourselves.

In our text, St. John was asked numerous times about himself.

His questioners clearly did not want to return to Jerusalem with half an answer.

St. John had grown in popularity. Everyone was going out to hear him. Many to be baptized by him.

You can imagine that there was probably some envy among the Jewish leaders at his audiences.

And the variety of people seeking him out, sinners, Roman soldiers, tax collectors...

Perhaps, like with Jesus later on, they were hoping he would say something to discredit himself.

Were they flattering him? Buttering him up so that he would slip up.

If they could tempt him to say that he was the Christ, or some other important prophet like Elijah, then they could attack him as an imposter, a fraud.

And how much damage would that have done to his work as Jesus' forerunner?

If St. John claimed to be something other than what he was,

who would have trusted him when he pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God?

But, in His gracious plan and working, the Lord kept St. John from making false claims.

He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

I think it is important to take note of the word translated as "confess".

In the Greek "homologaisw" = same words.

To confess means to say the same words as someone else.

And who was it that St. John the Baptist was saying the same things as here?

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,

'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

Except, it wasn't Isaiah he was copying but God, who had spoken through Isaiah.

The forerunner is not the Christ. The groomsman is not the Groom.

The sandal untier is not the Master.

The baptizer with water is not the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit.

The sinful priest is not the innocent Lamb.

John knew he could never be the Christ, because he, too, confessed his sins.

He admitted that God was correct in identifying all men, including himself, as sinners who needed saving.

But, oh, how uncommon is such honesty and humility in this world?!

James 3:8

As St. James said, **No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.**

And Jesus tells us why: **“what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart.”** St. Matthew 15:18

How we like to boast and brag about our accomplishments as if we gave ourselves the abilities and opportunities to perform them.

How you like to put yourself in the best light, even if that means pushing others out of it; ...to defend yourself, even if it means that you cannot tell the whole truth.

How you put yourself down, not in real humility,

but in order to give others an opportunity to praise you and stroke your ego.

How you squander opportunities to confess the truth about yourself,

and highlight the grace of God for you, and so miss opportunities to glorify God, instead of yourself.

Or perhaps you are not given to indulging your pride, but instead struggle to see any worth in yourself.

You put yourself down, not in true humility, but because you really can't see any value in yourself.

You find yourself doubting that God really loves you because you have nothing to offer Him.

And so you are given more to self-loathing, than to confessing.

So if pride and self-loathing are not appropriate responses to those who ask you,

What do you say about yourself? What is our proper response?

How can you make a good and godly confession as St. John did so faithfully?

While you may not be able to point to Isaiah and say, **“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,”** there are still confessions for you to make.

You can still say the same words as God says about you.

You do it when you acknowledge the sins that come from your heart through your mouth.

You do it when you recognize that God has you pegged, whether you tend to err in pride or despair.

And this is what you do when, as we are catechized to do every week,

you confess that you are by nature sinful and that you have sinned against Him by thought, word, and deed.

But do not stop there. Do not stay there and dwell only on this. This is only half of your confession.

Learn also from St. John. He did not stop at himself, but immediately moved on to Christ.

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’

In preaching repentance to the people, he was preparing them to hear and receive their Savior.

Even in answering the questions of those sent to him, he was eager to tell them about the Coming One,

“but among you stands One you do not know, even He who comes after me.”

And thankfully, through the faithful confessors of God, you do know and confess Him yourself,

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord

Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary,

Who was baptized to fulfill all your righteousness and to take your sins upon Himself,
Who always confessed His Father's Word, never spoke a lie, either about Himself or anyone else,
who faithfully confessed to be the Christ, even when He knew it meant His immediate crucifixion.
Who was indeed crucified, died, and was buried, and rose again the third day.
All this He did, not because you have earned or deserved it, but on account of His grace.

Your worth is not in your accomplishments... or lack thereof.

It's not in your level of perceived holiness, whether or not you are worthy to untie Jesus' sandals.
Your true worth is found in the divine blood that God shed for you.
It's found in your baptism, by which He has washed you in that blood.
It's found at His table, through which He nourishes you through that same blood.
It's found in His Word, by which you confess that that blood was shed for you and for your salvation.

You, dear Christian are not **"the voice of one crying in the wilderness."** That was John's role.
You are a baptized child of God.

You are the one that the Father has called at this time, to be in your various places and positions,
in which to serve as a neighbor to those around you,
whether it be to your family, or co-workers or classmates, or community members.
He has called you to make your confession by what you say and do, even what you don't say and do.
And often, what you do, like with St. John who was called to baptize,
gives opportunity for others to ask questions of you like, **What do you say about yourself?**

What wonderful opportunities these are to make a good confession.

That you are not the Christ, nor your own savior,
but that you have and know the Savior, Jesus Christ,
who has redeemed you, a lost and condemned creature,
purchased and won you from sin, death, and the power of the devil,
not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.
That you are a blessed child of God, baptized into Christ, baptized by the Holy Spirit.

...

You know, Jesus still stands among you.

He stands among you to give you of Himself.

As He has baptized you with the Holy Spirit,

He stands among you speaking His Word of comfort to you.

As you have confessed your sins of thought and word, and have confessed Him as your Savior,
so He also confesses you before His Father in heaven.

And He speaks the same words as the Father to you, "Your sins are forgiven."

He stands among you to give you that same precious divine blood to drink, along with His body,
to strengthen you in your bold confession, each and every day so when someone asks you,
What do you say about yourself?

You may tell them in great comfort, "I am baptized into Christ, I'm a child of paradise."

Thanks be to God. **Amen**

Soli Deo Gloria

