

**OPENING:**

When I lived in Boston, Massachusetts, the introductory question that people always asked was “What college did you graduate from?”

When I lived in New Orleans, Louisiana, that introductory question was instead “What high school did you go to?”

One city—highly (maybe overly) educated looking for clues about who you are tied to your academic status.

Another city—highly (maybe overly) insular looking for who you are based on where you happened to spend your teenaged years.

Two different settings, two different questions—but both quickly try to get at the heart of a person’s identity. Small talk, maybe, but also a probing and searching for an answer that could define who you are.

I think we all know the meet & greet question for this area: or at least inside the Beltway or in Washington, DC. It’s:

“What do you do for a living?”

behind which is the more explosive, unspoken, follow-up:

“So what political party do you associate yourself with?”

I have friends who have worked on Capitol Hill who could condense the search for another’s identity even further.

Cocktail parties are won or lost by the simple query: “House or Senate?”

**CONFESSION:**

The stakes are similarly high in our Gospel Reading.

The whole book of Mark could be said to rest on this question of Jesus:

“Who do you they say that I am?”

Our whole lives as Christians could likewise be narrowed down to how we answer it, with our lips and in our lives: “But who do *you* say that I am?”

This is a good lesson for us as we start our Formation year, as we continue to be formed “along the way” with this person Jesus, as we try to teach our children, try to teach ourselves, how to answer that question.

“You are the Messiah” is Peter’s answer.

It’s called his “Confession” which is weird because, in our understanding, a confession is defined as:

“an admission of something formerly concealed that does harm to one’s self.”

So it’s usually a bad thing, a different meaning than the one here.

Let’s pause there and consider the word then.

Think about... a “confession”... in a couple... where they are at that moment where one is about to say... “I love you”... first.

Think about... a friend... who gets the courage up... to say to another...:

“I need your help.”

This sort of confession is not our modern meaning, but still leaves you vulnerable and less of your former self.

You can’t go back, you are giving up something in the hope that your new life will be more whole and more true.

Think of those moments in your life when you were asked a question and you had to confess something that would expose who you are and make you vulnerable... but would also result in new life, in a birth into something new.

That’s the situation that Peter (and the disciples) are in.

That sort of confession, it’s like a *baby chick pecking itself out of its shell*.

That’s what is happening to Peter here and it’s not pretty, it goes in fits and starts, but you can almost feel like he needs to get out of where he was earlier, trapped in this shell.

## **BIBLE**

A little Biblical knowledge, here on our first Sunday of Formation.

You have Peter giving his confession here, it’s garbled and flawed but it’s a step in the right direction.

Later you have Peter failing his confession during Christ’s Passion in front of the fire, denying Jesus, denying, when asked the question, that he is from Jesus’ town, that he went to school with Jesus.

Finally, to bring in a 3<sup>rd</sup> example, at the end of Mark’s Gospel, you have the women at Jesus’ empty tomb after his death. Mary Magdalene *et al.* run from the empty tomb and they tell no one, confess it to nobody, or at least Mark’s Gospel ends that way.

3 confessions; one courageous, one catastrophic, one *in utero*, not yet hatched.

Extrabiblical knowledge now: Mary Magdalene is always depicted in legend and in myth with.... an egg..... symbolizing Christ's resurrection but also... for something else, for her precious and crackling Confession of who Jesus is

Mark's Gospel ends in silence, seemingly, with that question unanswered. But we know that's not how the story ends, that Mary Magdalene does give her confession.

We would not be here ready to give ours if not for her.

The Gospel ironically Mark's reminds us of that, by leaving the Confession still unvoiced and pregnant inside Mary, because then it focuses on how WE would answer that question.

Her willingness to be vulnerable and to risk at all becomes a model for us to become who we are by saying what we know to be true.<sup>1</sup>

## **PUBLIC**

Have you ever had one of those questions, which I started with, asked of you but where, all the sudden, the noise in the room drops and everyone is looking at you for how you will answer the question? Suddenly the pressure is on.

“Charles, where did you go to college?”

“Well it's a small military school in the middle of nowhere... you have never heard of it....Other than that's it's been in the news constantly. Yes, it's VMI; no I am not sexist or racist, not today.”

“Charles, what do you do for a living?”

Then everyone is looking at you. The noise in the room is vacuumed out, like at the end of our Gospel, the room is silent, and people wait for your Confession.

There's a preacher that I like from Mississippi, and she was once speaking somewhere in her native region and she started by saying:

“I am going to give you a testimony, might make you uncomfortable.

If we were in New England, I might say “tell you a story” but I am not putting you to bed at night, so I think you can handle it.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David May Sermon Grace Church (Kilmarnock, VA) 8/24/2008.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Condon, *Mockingbird Ministries*

Testimony.... Story... maybe Confession is just right for us as Episcopalians.  
Sacramental, Dignified, not too touchy-feely.

We also need to be reminded that that question, this confession, is not just personal, but public. That's what makes it so hard.

## **CONCLUSION**

I realize that I have not given a Confession, a testimony, a story or anything.  
Luckily, salvation is a journey, not an event. It does not have to happen all at one.

I will just give some teasers though to close out, some good little nuggets that you can maybe ponder or share on the Airplane or at the Cocktail Party when all the noise gets sucked out.

The first is from my mother, a good place to start. She was once asked, by one of our Evangelical brothers or sisters, maybe you have gotten this one before:

“Ma’am, have you been saved?”

“Why, yes, I have. It was 2000 years ago on a Hill in Jerusalem.”

Confession with a little snark, not too bad.

Here's a couple that are more friendly, more open-ended:

Why are you a Christian?”

“I am a Christian because I am not good enough to be anything else.”

Why are you a Christian?

“I am a Christian because I, like Mary Magdalene and Peter, need some place to fall apart and to be put back together again, to be nurtured in the life of Faith as a newborn chick. ”

**AMEN**