

Pentecost 13 8/27/23
Matthew 16:13-20 16A

HE SAID TO THEM, "BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?"

This past July, professional golfer Amy Olson was the center of attention golfing at the Ladies U.S. Open golf tournament. She was golfing 7-months pregnant and that made her the media darling.

I should point out there is a North Dakota connection to this story because Amy is from Fargo, and golfed at NDSU, where she was multi-time All-American and won numerous golf tournaments and awards. And in addition, her husband was a former standout on the Bison football team and is currently an assistant coach for the Bison. And, to put the story in its correct context, they are both devote Christians.

Which brings us to the rest of the story ... At the US Open, which is one of golf's greatest stages, a reporter from a major golf publication was assigned the job of interviewing Amy and, in the interview, she made comments about abortion, noting that there was an irony to her competing while pregnant right around the one-year anniversary of Roe V. Wade being overturned. And I quote,

"I will say that the irony is not lost on me that, one year ago, when Roe v. Wade was overturned, I was playing in a major championship outside Washington, D.C., and women from around the world, and even on tour, **were outraged.**"

Then, she added this,

"Now, a year later, people are celebrating that I'm going to be playing a major championship with an unborn child that they recognize **as a life.**"

In the interview, she went to speak about her Christian faith and the challenges of being a confessing Christian today. Again, I quote,

"It's very tough. Being a Christian has always been political because Christianity is supposed to touch every aspect of your life. I believe in comprehensive Christianity. It dictates how you treat people, how you think about the world, and the decisions that you make."

Anybody want to guess what the media's reaction was? Well, she was exactly their darling anymore. In fact, there was such pressure to silence her words that the editor demanded the reporter remove Amy's words from the article. He would not, much to his credit, and he was forced to resign.

In our Gospel today, we hear Jesus asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is" (v. 13)? They answer, "John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and other Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (v. 14). These may seem complimentary, but they miss the point because they are wrong. So Jesus asks them pointedly, to find out what is in their hearts, "But who do you say that I am" (v.15)? So how about it, Dear Child of God, What about you? Who do you say Jesus is? What's in your heart? Are you always – **always** – prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you (cf. 1 Pe 3:15)?

Some days, sometimes, that's pretty easy to do. Like on the day of your confirmation. You were asked, "What do you have to say about Jesus," and the pastor probably told you what to answer, or you read it out of the hymnal

Or on Sunday morning, when the pastor when the pastor says something like, "For our worship this morning we follow the order of service on page such-and-such in the hymnal." There it is, in black and white, what to say.

But, there are those other times, when, honestly, you would just as soon not even have Jesus around. Like when the topic of abortion comes

up, and you just pray no one asks you what you think, because you're embarrassed to confess that God says "You shall not murder," including the life of the unborn in the mother's womb. Or you're in the break room and everyone is bad-mouthing the boss, and you just sit there in embarrassed silence even though you know God commands you to defend your neighbor and speak well of him. Or the whole topic of marriage comes up, and someone is contending two men or two women should have the right to marry, especially if they love each other, and you don't dare confess that marriage is the life-long reunion of one man and one woman. And then there's everyone favorite – closed communion. You know, "I went to your church and they wouldn't let me go to Communion." And you just want to get away from it all.

Peter didn't just want to get way. Jesus asks, "Who do you {guys} says that I am and Peter answers for all of them, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16).

The Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. That one word -- one title really -- pretty much sums up the entire Old Testament. It takes us right back to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden fruit, and bring death – spiritual death and physical death – upon on all mankind. And right there, in the midst of their shame and guilt and embarrassment, right to the old accuser's face, God promises a Savior, the Christ, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Ge 3:15).

That's what Jesus did. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil," the Bible says (1 Jn 3:8). And He destroyed the works of the devil by taking upon Himself all the times you were

ashamed to confess Jesus; all the times you feared the judgment of men more than the judgment of God; all your sins. And He carried all of it to the cross and He did on that cross to do just what God promised He would – He crushed the devil’s head and silenced all His ugly accusations.

In the water and Word of your Baptism, God the Holy Spirit worked faith in you so that you believe with your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is the Christ.

And in Church, in Bible study, in daily devotions, in Sunday school, in Catechism class, and when you come to His Table to be fed His life-given Body and Blood, there is the Holy Spirit – the Third Person of the Holy Trinity – enlightening you with the Gospel, which is to say He is revealing Jesus Christ to you, teaching you who Jesus is, so that you can confess Jesus to be, “the Son of God,” “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus promises, “So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven” (Mt 10:32-33). Yes, Dear Friends in Christ, this is the “the hope that is in you,” this is Jesus in you.

Now kicking around in the back of your head might be some worrisome and guilty thoughts, “I have failed to boldly confess Jesus,” “I have not been diligent in reading Scripture, or attending church, or in daily devotions,” “I have not always been prepared to give answer for the hope that is in me.” If this is you ... in full or in part, repent, ask for the forgiveness of Christ Jesus and remember that He has died for you. And be encouraged, “for God gave us a spirit not of fear [and timidity] but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tm 1:7). Embrace the gifts given to you in your baptism into Jesus and remember the answer Saint Peter gave that

day. He did not answer for himself only, he spoke those words for himself and for the disciples, he spoke those words for you and for all Christians, all believers in Christ Jesus, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against this Christian faith. Where we fail in our confession of faith, Christ Jesus succeeded obediently confessing the truth all the way to the cross, through death, to His resurrection, to life everlasting, and on that solid Rock we stand, for all other ground is sinking sand.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.