

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from the one Messiah,
Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

It was Inauguration Day, January 20, 2009. About 2 million Americans stood in the cold, on the Mall in Washington DC to witness the peaceful transfer of power from one president, George W. Bush, to the next, Barack Obama. All were anxious for the main event to begin. Many had stood in the cold for hours waiting for this moment. Finally, the enormous video screen in front of the Smithsonian showed Barack Obama raising his right hand to take the oath of office. The crowd went wild. John Roberts, Chief Justice of the United States, laid out the oath: "I, Barack Hussein Obama, do solemnly swear that I will execute the office of President faithfully." Oops, problem was, the oath was supposed to read: "I, Barack Hussein Obama, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President." The word faithfully had somehow flipped out of place, landing at the end of the phrase. Barack Obama seemed confused. He followed the Chief Justice's lead for a few words and then stopped. The justice gave it another shot. They tried together to get back on track, and then the ceremony awkwardly concluded. Along with millions of Americans, I noticed and wondered what in the world just happened.

All kinds of political chatter immediately erupted. Because Senator Obama had voted against John Roberts' Supreme Court appointment, some people said the

mix-up was intentional. Others claimed Barack Obama could not become president until he said the oath of office correctly. Just to be safe, Obama and Roberts repeated the oath the next day, in private.

Now you can probably expect historians will be examining this little incident for years. Initial assessments seem to be that the fault lies with Chief Justice Roberts because he fed the lines to the president-elect incorrectly, but here's the bigger question: What does it matter? The phrase "execute the office of President faithfully" has the same meaning as "faithfully execute the office of President." It's a distinction without a difference. Besides, the 20th Amendment to the Constitution states that the terms of the outgoing president and vice president shall end at noon on the 20th day of January, and the terms of their successors shall then begin. There is absolutely no mention of an oath of office. So, according to this amendment, the transfer of power could have happened with George W. Bush giving Barack Obama a fist-bump at high noon on January 20. Now that would be worth standing in the cold to see.

In the eighth chapter of Mark, Jesus asks his disciples who he is, and Peter answers, "You are the Messiah". He's exactly right in what he says and doesn't mess up any of the words of this particular pledge of allegiance. Yet, getting the words right isn't all there is to being a faithful disciple. Peter doesn't fully comprehend the importance of what he's saying. Just look at what happens next.

He confronts Jesus just a few verses later, when Jesus begins to teach his followers that he “must undergo great suffering ... and be killed”. Peter nails the oath, but not the office. He does a great job pledging his allegiance to Jesus, but he doesn't grasp what the job of following the Messiah is all about. That's why today we're going to closely examine the most important four words anyone can ever say out loud. We are going to look at each word of this confession of Peter, so we might be able to make our own confession—Jesus, you are the Messiah in our lives.

The first word in Peter's confession is You. Peter is saying, You, this Jesus of Nazareth, you are the Messiah. Notice this word 'you' is a very personal word. Peter was saying loud and clear he knew this savior well. He had a personal, intimate relationship with him. You, Jesus, you are someone I know and someone who knows me. This 'you' isn't some vague God, but a personal God, a God who is concerned about me, as much as I am about getting to know you better.

When I was in seminary my senior year the drama professor from Capital put on a play at Trinity. I was chosen as the lead actor, the Jesus character, probably because I had pretty long hair at the time and just seemed to fit the part. In this play the six characters were what he called archetypes. They were all metaphors for different aspects of the human species. One of the lines in the play towards the beginning said we were just ideas wanting to come alive in the people who were acting out the ideas on the paper script. That's what Jesus is and wants

to be in our lives. He wants to come alive from the pages of the Bible and be acted out in our lives every moment of every day through you and me. Those six characters wanted to live their lives in someone else because that was the only way their story would be told. I think all of us have a character in us who is clamoring to be heard, we have someone who is trying to tell his life story through us, the chief character in all of our lives is Jesus Christ. That's the meaning of Peter's word, You. Is Jesus that personal for you? Is your relationship so intimate with Christ he's the character living out his life in you?

The next word of Peter's confession is 'are'. Peter says, "You are. Are in the English language is a verb. It's a to be verb which means something now, something for today, and something for tomorrow and forever. Jesus is, for Peter, something for today, and something forever. Is Jesus that kind of person for you? Is he going to be in your today's as well as your tomorrow's and every moment in between? A relationship with Jesus Christ is something for today and tomorrow. Even when we have turned away from Christ, he is still there working through the events and people in our lives. Jesus Christ is in your life whether you know it or not. Are you willing to acknowledge his presence today and tomorrow? Are you willing to let him be the power and the strength for your life? Can you confess as Peter did, You *are* the Messiah?

The next word in Peter's confession is *the*. Sometimes we tend to skip over words like the, a, an and others. They're words that usually carry very little weight. Not in this case! In faith's famous four words, *the* is a very important word. This simple word 'the' tells us Peter was seeing Jesus as the only Messiah, the only Lord, the only savior for his life. Peter didn't say you are a Messiah, a Christ among many, a savior among many, a lord among many, a God among many. No, Peter said *the*, meaning the only one, the only Lord, the only savior, the only God of his life. When they introduce football players and tell folks what college they come from they say this player graduated from Purdue and that one from Syracuse, but when they come to one of our local boys from up the road they say this player graduated from **THE** Ohio State University leaving no doubt where that player is from!

When you and I think about Jesus in our lives, do we tend to put an 'a' before his name or a 'the'? Is Jesus one savior, one God among many, or is he the only God in your life? Is Jesus the only God we worship, the only God that's glorified, the only God that brings meaning and purpose to life, or is Jesus one among a whole host of god's in your life? Does he have to take second place to money, or work, or time, or hobbies, or holding on to grudges? Is Jesus just one of the many gods you worship? Many people place making money ahead of God, many place time ahead of Him because they say they don't have or don't want to

take the time to worship God. Many place hatred or unloving behavior before Jesus because it's more important for them to carry grudges from the past, or find faults in people today which in their minds valid their rationale for skipping the worship of *the* one true God. What is it for you? Is there an 'a' before the name of Jesus for you or a 'the'?

Finally, the last word in faith's famous four words is Messiah. Messiah which means Christ, the anointed one, one part of the trinity. Christ, one part of the Godhead. Christ, the Son of God who came to earth to show, tell, and bring the love of God to us. On the day this Gospel story took place only one of the disciples saw God in Jesus. That one was Peter. For the first time, Peter grasped the momentous fact that Jesus was the Messiah. It wasn't a full understanding, but Peter was able to comprehend, if only dimly, God's presences in Jesus. He was able to make his own confession of faith. Yes, Jesus you are God, you are the anointed, you are God incarnate.

You and I are called by God to make that same kind of response. We're called to respond to the same personal question Jesus asked the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." Today, Jesus is asking you, "Who do you say that I am?" May your answer to Jesus' question be the controlling influence over every thought, word, and deed from the moment you say, "You... are... the... Christ..." Amen.