

Palm Sunday/Confirmation: April 14, 2019

“Just Confirming: Why You Are Here?”

Grace, Mercy and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text for this morning is our Gospel Lesson, John 12; a portion of which was read during the Procession of Palms, and the rest read just a few moments ago.

It can be easy on a day like today to forget why you are here. It can be easy to turn this day, this service, into one that is about these three special students, wearing white robes. It may be hard for them to hear this sermon and the sound of my voice over the pounding of their hearts, but this day is not about them. This day is not about you. Just as every other Divine Service, this day is about Jesus. It is about Jesus; it is for you.

Today these three will stand and confess in the Jesus as Lord who saves them from their sins. They cannot save themselves. They do not forgive themselves. They do not worship themselves. If you have taken the time to read the worship notes for this day you will have already read, *“Confirmation is a custom of the Church and not a sacrament. It links the catechumens to their Baptism, celebrates the reception of the Lord’s Word among them, and, in cases where the candidates have not yet communed, welcomes them to the Lord’s Table...Confirmation declares of a catechumen that he or she is a Christian who has been baptized, confesses the faith, and is in communion with Christ and His Church. The reception of catechumens to the Lord’s Table assumes that ongoing catechesis is the way of life for the faithful Christian.”*

What does this mean? It means that your life is not over today. When you are confirmed, God does not take you from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven as soon as Pastor gives you the confirmation blessing. This day publicly declares you to be able to examine yourself rightly, and discern the body and blood of Christ. This day is not about you, it is for you.

What is a confirmation? I fear there is much understanding of this day, not only for those that have no connection with the Church, but also by many church members themselves. Some see this day as a spiritual inoculation; that is, this day somehow vaccinates against every spiritual sickness.

Others view this day as a graduation. A course of education that is set by the church is now seen to be completed. You are given a certificate of that achievement, and relief that the end has somehow come. We even throw parties that are akin to graduation parties, so

it is hard not to make this kind of connection. Sadly, just as many say goodbye to their Alma Maters, so many say goodbye to the church upon confirmation. What is to be a beginning, turns out to be an end.

So what does it mean that these three are to be confirmed? Simply, they are doing the confirming. They are confirming with their own lips the promises first spoke at their baptism. Holy Baptism is the “*washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*”¹

Through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, children are given the gift of the Holy Spirit who receives them into the Kingdom of Grace. The washing is but one part of the baptism. The act happens once, what flows from it is life-long. Confirmation does not end your life, it is one stop on the way. Christ’s instruction to the baptized is to be taught to observe all things that He has commanded.² This starts in the home with parents and sponsors. The Church has Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and Pre-confirmation classes to assist parents in the noble task of raising Christian children to live and cherish their baptism.

In the course of this learning, you three have reached this day. It is a day where you and the church simply agree that you are able to examine yourself correctly according the Word of God, and that you know what is being done on the Altar of our Lord. It is a day of confirming your faith is the same confessed here by this Pulpit and Altar. It is a day that professes from this day forward, you know how to prepare and receive the Lord’s Supper worthily. That your life continues, and gets harder, so here you have forgiveness through Christ’s body and blood; food for strength for the rest of your earthly days, and a foretaste of the feast that is to come.

Who is this Christ? On whose body do you feast? Whose blood covers your sin? He is God who became flesh and knows every struggle you will ever face. He knows the adversity, and the persecution, and the heartache, and the confusion, and the chaos, and the death. You walked in today in a great procession. The garments worn by the Pastor displayed the glory of the Office of Jesus. The children sang and waved palm branches; signs of victory and royalty. These we do to remind us of the start of this Holy Week.

¹ Titus 3:5–7

² Cf. Matthew 28:19-20

Holy Week is a glorious snapshot of the life of a Christian, and we would do well to pattern all of our weeks, and our prayers after this one. Palm Sunday is a day of rejoicing. The King of Kings is here. Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

Then for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, the whole gamut of emotions is felt and displayed. Life is lived, teachings are taught. Each day is a roller coaster of ups and downs, which push to Thursday. On Thursday, a special meal is eaten by Jesus and those who hold the same confession. This is not open to just anyone, but only to those who live in this most intimate family of Christ, not by family bloodlines, but born by His blood. After this meal is betrayal, and ridicule, and scorn, which leads to Friday, the day of death. Even death is not met with a peaceful form. The rest doesn't come until Saturday, the rest in the tomb. And then by God's grace, the week begins anew with rejoicing as Jesus, who once was dead, is now raised, and death's dark prison is broken.

This week is about Jesus, and what He has done for you; what He still does for you. While the act is done, the fruit is given. Jesus says, "***The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.***"³ Make no mistake, this was no easy task for Jesus. While He willingly did the Father's will, He did not have a smile on his face the entire time. He wasn't completely sheltered and vaccinated against the harshness of Satan, the bitterness of the world, or the wickedness of death. He tells Andrew and Philip, "***Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.***"⁴

Jesus lived and died not for Himself. Through His death, God's name is glorified. Jesus will recall this from Psalm 22 as He prays from the cross, "***It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.***"⁵

The hour of Jesus, the glory of Jesus, is found right here, on the cross, for you. You live in a life full of crosses, and they don't end today. Jesus has taken your guilt and your punishment for sin away, all right here, through His suffering and death. This is important to never forget.

³ John 12:23-24

⁴ John 12:27-28

⁵ Psalm 22:30-31

This is why today cannot be a graduation. This is why it is ever important that the Divine Service and the study of God's Word are continually done. To forget this simple truth is eternally deadly. If you are not in God's Word, you are in Not God's Word. The pull of the world and the desire of the sinful flesh are constantly at work to pull you away from the truth.

You have chosen great confessions to remember this day. Alex, ***“Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”***⁶ If you are not constantly in the Word of God, how do you know God is with you? You have the grace of your baptism, and the gift of the Lord's Supper. You have the gift of His word; the only weapon, the only tool Christ used against temptation. Do not rely on your own reason or strength, trust in the Word. To trust in the Word, you have to know the Word.

Oliver, ***“By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”***⁷ This is the heart of the Gospel, really the Gospel summed up rather nicely. You are saved, not by anything you have done. You cannot save yourself. Jesus has done it. He has died the death meant for you. He has done it as a gift. Here is your confirmation gift: take eat, take drink. His blood is poured out for you. This is not your own doing. Through faith, that He has given you, you are saved.

Jenna, ***“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”***⁸ This is one of my favorite, go-to, verses in times of sickness and trouble. Notice who is the actor of these verbs: God. He is the one who gives strength and help. He is the one who upholds. You are given the state of no fear. You are given peace. And how is this done? By His righteous right hand! Do you know what that means? Do you know who that is? It's Jesus! He is the righteousness of God. He is true God and true man, who sits at the right hand of God. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him, and in Him you are baptized. Through Jesus, you are given strength.

Do you know where to find Jesus? In those very places He has said you can find Him. Baptism gives you Jesus. I have already read Titus 3. Baptism pours Jesus richly upon you. Christ said, ***“Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among***

⁶ Joshua 1:9

⁷ Ephesians 2:8

⁸ Isaiah 41:10

them.”⁹ How do we start every service? IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT! If we are gathered in His name, and He is here, just as He promised, why would you want any of this to be about you? How much better that it is about Christ, God in the flesh, who died for your sins. That is why we hold so tightly to these gifts, even in the face persecution and many who seeks to make this day about my work. If we still haven’t quite caught on, Christ comes through lowly bread and wine inviting, “Take, eat. This is My body. Take, drink. This is My blood.” By Christ’s own words, He shows the glory of His death is for you. Eat. Drink. He drank the cup of wrath, you drink the cup of life.

This is why you are here. You are here because you are sinners in need of saving. You are hurting and dying people, and there is only One who can save you. You are hungry and thirsty for true righteousness, and here you are led by quiet waters, to sit in peace in pews with brothers and sisters in Christ, as He prepares a table before you in the presence of your enemies of sin and death, where your cup overflows with forgiveness, life, and salvation.

“‘Hosanna in the highest!’

That ancient song we sing;
For Christ is our Redeemer,
The Lord of heav’n our King.
Oh, may we ever praise Him
With heart and life and voice
And in His blissful presence
Eternally rejoice!”¹⁰ Amen.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of the Church
Palm Sunday
14 April 2019

⁹ Matthew 18:20

¹⁰ Hosanna, Loud Hosanna LSB 443:3

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. For the Holy Church as she embarks on the holiest week of the Church Year, that she may be defended against the assaults of Satan, boldly proclaim Christ and Him crucified, and behold her King coming to her humbly and hidden via His Holy Word and Sacraments, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For our Christian lives, especially today for our catechumens, that we would be granted faithfulness in times of temptation, repentance and forgiveness when we fall, love for all our brothers and sisters in Christ, reconciliation with those from whom we are alienated, and boldness to confess the faith we have in Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the members of this congregation, that trusting in Him who gave Himself humbly as a sacrifice for us, we would humbly give ourselves in service to Him and the people of this world; that we would shout our hosannas of welcoming praise; and that we would never fail to trust Christ, whose Passion provides our salvation, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all whom our Father has given authority in civil governments, that God would guide their decisions and desires so that life is defended, justice upheld and the will of Him before whom all knees will bow is done, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who live without faith in Christ, that the Holy Spirit would call them to repentance and give them the gift of faith to believe in the One who comes in the name of the Lord, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those stricken by disease; for those enduring famine and natural disasters; for those in bondage; and for those who are sick, shut-in, recovering or have any need, *[especially for those who have requested our prayers, including Larry, Philip, Greg, and those we name in our hearts,]* that our heavenly Father would hear their pleas, meet their needs, relieve their suffering and lead them to rejoice in Him who never fails us in our time of need, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who celebrate another year of earthly life, especially his servants, ***Caden, Elizabeth, Alex, and Lance***, that God would grant them wisdom and grace, and strengthen them to trust in His goodness all the days of their life, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who receive the Holy Supper of our Lord today, that they would eat His body and drink His blood in repentance and faith, and that they would be strengthened to love others as Christ has loved them, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who have departed this vale of tears in faith and now sleep in Jesus, let us give thanks to the Lord; that He would shepherd us in that same faith until our last hour, bringing us, with them, into His Kingdom, which has no end, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**