

Faithful is He Who Calls You

I Thessalonians 5:23-24, May 14, 2010

Exaudi Sunday (after Ascension)

Beloved of the Lord.... Last Friday evening a young man was confirmed at Resurrection Lutheran Church, North Sioux City, S.D. All went well at his examination, and those of us who were confirmed many years ago couldn't help but remember our own confirmation. But what exactly is confirmation? Why does the Lutheran Church have this custom or practice? The rite of confirmation is closely related to Holy Baptism. When we were baptized as infants, our sponsors spoke for us in our stead in order to signify "what God in and through Baptism works." What did God work through our baptism? In, by, and through Christ, His blood, His merits, "according to His mercy [God] saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." When infants are baptized, there is not only forgiveness, but the Holy Spirit regenerates them, working true and saving faith into their little hearts so they believe, love, and trust in God above all things. Thus when we are baptized as infants, our sponsors confess the newly created but invisible faith which infants cannot yet audibly confess, but inwardly believe. "Dost thou renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways?...Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty?...in Jesus Christ, his only Son?.....in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Christian Church?" In each instance and case, by the power of the Holy Ghost working through baptismal regeneration, the God-given faith of that infant answers, "I do, I do, and I do". Yet because that infant cannot yet speak, and true faith is always hidden within, the sponsor answers in the stead and in the place of the child, "I do, I do, and I do".

"I do so intend, with the help of God." This was our public oath at our own confirmation, many years ago. How many years has it been since our confirmation?.....10, 20, 40, 60? That we are yet in the true faith today can only prove our confirmation was God's Word, God's glory. It was God Himself who confirmed us many years ago, when He taught our heart the Gospel, that God has justified the whole world through Christ, so that even now we still believe "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." When we made our vows at confirmation, we were renewing our vows of baptism long ago. Our confirmation years later truly proves the same Holy Spirit given through Baptism has remained and been fruitful. Therefore dear Confirmand, dear child of God

for whom Christ died, as you look at those years behind you and those years ahead: Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid, "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."

I. The vows of confirmation. When we think about it, the vows we take at confirmation are more important than our wedding vows. The marriage bond is temporal – till death do us part. Our vow at confirmation however is of a spiritual nature which begins on earth but continues forever in heaven. Thus God promises us while we are on earth, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." We should then be faithful and hold fast to our confirmation vow, even if it means the loss of our life. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Jesus said, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." The Bible says, "if we deny Him, He also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2). But "if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" and "If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him." Though it is natural to fear death, the faith the Holy Spirit has given us by the Gospel teaches us that since Jesus died and rose again ascending into heaven, so we through Christ will ascend to heaven after death. Jesus said, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

Heaven however, is only given to those who stay and remain faithful to their baptismal and confirmation vow. Therefore dear Confirmand, take your vow seriously, for the eternal welfare of your soul depends on it. In our world today there are many lost sheep who have denied their baptismal or confirmation vow. Just as Esau sold his own birthright for a bowl of pottage, so many after confirmation despise the true love of Christ only so they can enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Some after confirmation are seduced by premarital sex, drugs, or drunkenness. Others get married but then commit adultery. Some fall in love with the world and the things of the world. But do not be deceived. The devil also seduces souls by way of pride. There are many professing Christians who go to church every Sunday and they do not fall into these gross outward sins, but inwardly in their heart they think God will take them to heaven because they have been good Christians all their life. They think they have done many good works for God's kingdom, and they have forgotten the only good work which saves us from our sins, is the good work of Jesus Christ, His life, His death, His blood, His merit, His righteousness

– and not our own. Thus with whichever tool the devil approaches and tempts you dear Christian, remember when you were confirmed you renounced the devil and all his works and all his ways. “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

II. Faithful is He that calls you. But how do we find strength to resist and faithfully keep our vows? God answers “Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.” Thanks be to God our faithful God will help, for “The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” In the Gospel, our God of Peace declares unto us the Prince of Peace who with His own body and blood, gave His life as a ransom, in exchange for our soul. In the Gospel of Peace, our Heavenly Father declares unto us His heavenly heart: that for the sake of His heavenly Son, God is at peace with all men. Thus as a sponsor speaks in the stead and place of a child, Jesus our ascended and High Priest in heaven still through His blood speaks in the stead and place of all sinners, declaring us washed, cleansed, redeemed and forgiven. If then you want strength to resist the devil, if you want the strength to lead a holy and faithful life to the Lord, consider the word CONFIRMATION, and the words, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Gospel preaching. In these Gospel Means of Grace our faithful God is CONFIRMING US again and again with His forgiveness of sins for the assurance and comfort of our soul. In the Gospel for the sake of Christ’s blood God is making an oath, even swearing to you dear Confirmand, “Thy sins and thy iniquities I will remember no more.”

This Gospel truth however can only be received by faith. Forgiveness is not a tangible item. We cannot hold forgiveness in our hands or carry in our pockets. We possess forgiveness only by faith in our heart. Those outside the Holy Christian Church have no forgiveness of sins at all but this is not because Christ is not the Savior of all, HE IS, but those in unbelief refuse by unbelief to possess Him and “He that believeth not shall be damned.” Unbelievers do not repent, do not believe, and continue in their sin. As for we who believe, we believe “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, by the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel”. This is the same as saying, “faithful is He that calleth you.” In that precious moment of time, usually our baptism, God called us by the Gospel, regenerated and quickened us. “That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Therefore dear Confirmand, since you want to continue in the true faith unto life everlasting, be sure to regularly receive the Means of Grace. Commune

often for His body and blood are “given and shed for you for the remission of sins.” Likewise be sure to continue and remain with a congregation which teaches the pure Gospel and does not depart one jot or tittle from the truth of God’s Word. Always be sorry in your heart for your sins, yet ever rejoice Jesus does not turn repentant sinners away, but happily forgives them through the Sacraments and Gospel preaching. Through these Means of Grace the Holy Spirit will feed, strengthen, and clothe your soul with Christ so that you stay and remain in the true faith until your last breathe. Do not be afraid of falling but be assured, “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the Day of Jesus Christ.” Phil. 1:6 Because of Jesus, heaven is your true home.

III. “I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless.” Finally, “the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Since God through Christ has indeed justified and declare you righteous, be sure to live that holy and blameless life God would have you live. Devote your life entirely to God’s service, in whatever your calling may be, and be sure not to despise the riches of His grace, by sinful living for “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

“Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.” “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.” “Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” “Be strong and of a good courage.” “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” In His Gospel covenant, His Gospel oath, God swears to us through the blood of His Son, “Thy sins be forgiven thee, go in peace.” It is always HIS Gospel that confirms OUR hearts, dear child of God. Therefore give Him ALL your heart, ALL your soul, and ALL your mind by works of love. May all true believers say this day and every day, “I do so intend, with the help of God.” Amen.