

Sermon for May 20, 2012 – Confirmation Sunday

1 John 4:13-16

Theme: The LORD is with you.

- 1) *His Spirit prompts your confession.*
- 2) *Remain in His love.*

<sup>13</sup> *By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.* <sup>14</sup> *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.* <sup>15</sup> *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.* <sup>16</sup> *And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*

Rachel, Dylan and Ben – are you nervous? Soon you will be standing up here, confessing your faith in Christ. Soon you will be freely making a promise that you, with God's help, intend to be faithful to Him and His Gospel. You will promise to participate in worship and partake of the Lord's Supper as often as you can. By doing this, you are confessing your love for Christ – a love you have for Him because of His love for you.

Are you nervous? Don't be. Why not? Because the almighty LORD himself is with you. How do I know? Because it is the Holy Spirit himself who has worked in you the desire to make these promises. He loves you. Remain in His love.

Part One: His Spirit prompts you confession.

The Lord is with you – what a comfort it is to know this, not only on this day when you make your good confession before this congregation that loves you and prays for you, but every day that you live this world that is hostile to Jesus and his message of salvation.

Today is not the day to be nervous, for you are with your spiritual family. But outside of these walls you are often on your own. Next year you will be in High School. You will be tempted by classmates and friends to do things that are wrong. You will be taught things like evolution that will try to compromise your faith. You will be called unloving and hateful for calling homosexuality a sin. Friends will try to get you to compromise your morals by being flippant about God's gift of sex, and laughing at you if you claim your virginity with pride. Other Christians will put pressure on you to compromise your faith, claiming that doctrine is not important, that all religions are basically the same, that the only important thing is to live a good life before God. This, sadly, is your future, your tomorrow. How do I know? Because this is what I faced when I was your age.

Yes, today is not the day to be nervous about your confession, but you know what? Neither is tomorrow, nor the day after that. Actually, there never is a day that you have to be nervous or afraid of confessing Christ, regardless of who you confess Christ to. And why not? Because the almighty God who created the heavens and the earth, the all-powerful God, who has defeated the devil and all the powers of hell, is right next to you, commanding his angels concerning you.

How can you know that God abides with you? St. John tells us: *By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.*

Yes, you know that God the Holy Spirit abides in you because of the various gifts of the Spirit He has given you – the foremost being faith and joy in Christ. Christians love Christ. They love Christ because they know two things: first of all that they are damnable sinners who are completely lost without Christ, and secondly that God is love, and in love He sent His Son to be *the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* (1 John 2:2). Christians love Christ because Christ loves them; and because of this love, they share Christ to the world

St. John writes: *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.* Now, none of you have seen Christ the way the apostle John saw him, but you still have seen him. How? Not with your physical eyes, but with your eyes of faith. As you read and meditate on the Gospel you most clearly see Christ portrayed. You know Him

and His love for you. You are excited and overwhelmed by it. And this excitement and love causes you to confess Christ to the world around you.

And what exactly do you confess about Christ? This, that *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

St. John says: *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.* What a wonderful comfort this is for us as we go out into a world that is hostile to confess Christ: God is with us and we are in Him. There is nothing we need to be afraid of. People can laugh at us, friends can disown us – it does not matter, because God himself is with us. He will never leave nor forsake us. He will keep his promise: *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:20)

Sadly, when it comes to confessing Christ before the world, all of us – myself included – have to hang our heads in shame, don't we? How often haven't we failed to confess Christ because we were afraid of what people might think! How often haven't we sheepishly laughed along at a crude joke, or kept silent about the blessing of being a virgin and saving yourself for marriage in the face of someone who is bragging about their supposed sexual exploits? How often haven't we just shut up when religion becomes a matter of discussion, or try to change the subject instead of witnessing Christ?

Whoever confesses Christ – God abides in him . . . but what about the person who fails to confess, does God abide in him? Lord, forgive us. Have mercy on us. Save us.

And save us Christ did, through his perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection. He has called us through the Gospel and created faith in our hearts in baptism. He has forgiven all our sins. We are his dearly loved children through faith.

And because God has showered such great love on us, we want to confess this love to the world. We want other people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. And so, we confess Christ in joy – not looking at the possible persecution we face for confessing him, but rather looking at the love, salvation and wonderful blessings that are ours through faith in Christ Jesus. The LORD himself is with you. Remain in His love.

#### Part Two: Remain in His love.

St. John writes: *And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*

Ben, Dylan and Rachel: what you learned in confirmation class was nothing new. It was what you had been taught ever since you became a baptized member of Immanuel. You have long believed in the love that God has for you. You have experienced it in your life. God has been faithful to you in the past, and he will continue to be faithful to you in the future. Why? Because God is love.

God is love – what wonderful words these are, and yet how sad it is that they are rarely believed. Most people - even most Christians - view God as a merciless judge, whom we need to be terrified of. And, sadly, we also often fall for the temptation to view God in this way. We too are tempted not to bother God with our requests, or to wait with them until we have earned some sort of favor with him. We too are tempted to think that God is so angry with our sins, that He will not forgive them unless we do something to prove our remorse.

But God is love. Oh, how happy is the person who takes these words to heart. God doesn't just have love, He is love personified. Every good thing one can say about love, this all is true about God. God is love, and you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you are the objects, the recipients of his love! Consider what Jesus says: *Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.* <sup>14</sup> *You are my friends if you do what I command.* <sup>15</sup> *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.* (John 15:13-15). Consider this promise recorded by St. Paul, that if *God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* (Romans 8:32).

God loves you. Remain in this love. But how do you do that? Well, it is quite simple really. Do you remember what the word “grace” means? Grace means underserved love. Do remember what the means of grace are? They are the tools God uses the channel His love to us. The Gospel in word and Sacrament are the means by which the Holy Spirit channels and pours out God’s grace and love upon us. So if you want to remain in God’s love, then remain in the Gospel.

There are so many temptations leading us away from the Gospel. Many times we are too tired to read the Bible after a long day at school or work. We are too stressed or late getting up to have a devotion in the morning. Some days we just don’t feel like reading, using the excuse that we probably won’t understand it anyway. Too many things separate us from both private devotion time and worship: sporting events, work, leisure, etc. . . Soon the Gospel become something we know we ought to read, but we can’t get ourselves to do it. And as we find ourselves drifting away from the Gospel, we also find ourselves starting to question God’s love for us. We start becoming selfish and demanding of God. We start to fear and mistrust him, forgetting about his past faithfulness. When we drift away from the Gospel, we drift away from God and the salvation he procured for us in love.

God is love. He does not want you lost and apart from Him. Remain in the Gospel and you will remain in his love. Remain in the Gospel and you will be truly happy and content. You will see that the LORD, your God, is with you. You will grow in your trust that He cares for you. You will find peace for your conscience, forgiveness for your soul, and hope in any and every circumstance, knowing that in the end, you will see God’s face, and live forever in his house as His dearly loved child. Remain in the Gospel and you will remain in His love.

Ben, Rachel and Dylan: You are about to make your good confession before all the people gathered here. Are you nervous? Don’t be. Why not? The LORD is with you. It is His Spirit that prompts your confession. Remain in His love always. Amen