

Sermon for May 4, 2013 - Confirmation

Hebrews 13:20–21 (NKJV)

Theme: The Lord is Your Shepherd.

- 1) *He laid down his life in order to save you*
- 2) *He promises to work his good and gracious will through you*

²⁰ *Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Dear Mason, Haylie and Andrew,

A karate master once told me: “A lot of people think earning a black belt means that you have finished studying the art of karate. This is not true at all. A black belt actually means that you absorbed enough of the basics to start learning the art of karate.”

This truth about karate most certainly applies to what you learned in catechism class as well. Confirmation is not the same as graduation. You have not learned every wonderful thing there is to know about God and your salvation. You have learned the basics. Your confirmation merely means that you are ready to begin applying the basic teachings you learned, as you continue to grow in faith throughout your journey on this earth.

Yes, life most certainly is like a long journey home and you are entering a new phase of it. As you approach adulthood, the devil will begin to use new and powerful temptations to try to separate you from your salvation; for example, a boy or girl friend wanting to take your relationship to the “next level,” teachers and professors who mock what you believe, and friends who make fun of the fact that you take religion seriously. Our society is becoming more and more godless. Are you ready to face these dangers that threaten to tempt you away from Christ and your salvation? You are ready - only if you continue to hold on to **the Lord, who is your Shepherd**. 1) *He laid down his life to save you.* 2) *He promises to work his good and gracious will in and through you.*

Part One: *He laid down his life in order to save you*

Our sermon text is part of a larger letter written to Jewish Christians who were being mocked and persecuted for their belief in Jesus. The author of Hebrews encourages these Christians to remain faithful to Christ and live their lives in accordance with their faith. At the end of his letter, the author offers up this wonderful prayer:

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

What gives the author of this letter to the Hebrews confidence that the Lord will work in and through the Hebrew Christians – preserving them in their faith? The fact that the LORD made peace between Him and us. How did God accomplish this peace? Through Jesus’ work of saving us.

The Bible says: *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* (Isa 53:6 NKJV) As you have learned in confirmation class, all people are sinful. God demands perfect obedience to His Ten Commandments in thought, word and deed, but no one is able to do this. We all have inherited a sinful nature from our first parents Adam and Eve. Like dumb sheep we don't think about what we do and easily wander away from our loving Creator. In countless ways we have sinned against him. For this we deserve to be abandoned to hell forever.

But the Lord did not want us lost. This is why He sent his one and only Son to do the impossible: win salvation for us. How did Jesus do this? First of all, He lived the perfect life we all failed to live. He was tempted in every way – just as we are - but was without sin. Having earned the righteousness (the perfect record of sinlessness) that we all need to stand before God, Jesus then took our sins upon himself and went to the cross to suffer for them all. Our sins died with Jesus. And when He rose from the dead, our hope rose with him. His resurrection proves that we are forgiven. It proves that God has accepted his sacrifice on our behalf. God made a promise (a covenant) with all Old Testament believers that He would one day send a Savior, who would win forgiveness for the entire world. Jesus is the fulfillment of that everlasting covenant. His resurrection proves it.

Jesus is your Good Shepherd who laid down his life in order to save you from your sins. If God allowed Jesus to do this for you, you can be certain that He will remain with you throughout your life – giving you every gift necessary to preserve you in your faith until He delivers you from this wicked world to Himself in heaven. How can you be certain of this? Because the Scriptures say: *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?* (Rom 8:32 NKJV)

Part Two: He promises to work his good and gracious will through you

It's because of this truth that the author of the letter to the Hebrews confidently prays: *Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.*

Your Good Shepherd will not let you face all the dangers that are out there threatening your soul all alone. No, the LORD promises to watch over you and give you every gift necessary to accomplish both your salvation, and the salvation of others through you.

Now, what did I mean when I just said that the LORD will give you every gift necessary to accomplish your salvation and the salvation of others *through you*? God saved you with two purposes in mind: 1) that you might be rescued from the power of the devil and live with him forever in heaven; and 2) that you might be His ambassadors of salvation on this earth: proclaiming the truth about God's saving love for all in both your words and actions so that others might believe and be saved. Jesus once said: *You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house."¹⁶ "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.* (Mat 5:14-16 NKJV)

God started making you a light on this dark earth when you were first baptized and has continued this work in you throughout your life up until this point. And do you know what? Being confirmed doesn't mean He will stop either. No, the LORD will continue to use His Word and Sacraments to both strengthen your faith and give you every gift necessary so that we can glorify His name on this earth

The LORD has a plan for your life – a plan for you that is more involved than merely finishing high school, going to college, pursuing a career and getting married. He knows your future and is equipping you with the gifts necessary so that you can do the things He wants you to do. And what does God want you to do? To live for him as He lived for you. He wants you to love your neighbor as yourself, pray for all people (including your enemies), and think about how you can honor Him by obeying his commandments – not because you have to, but because you want to give glory to God in a society that is becoming increasingly hostile to the Christian faith. The Lord wants you, through your words and actions, proclaim the truth about sin and His salvation so that many more people might repent, believe in Jesus and be saved.

The LORD promises to surround you with his love, protect you from every danger that threatens your soul and work through you as you witness his saving grace through your words and actions. When this happens, you will soon realize that it was not you who accomplished anything, but the Holy Spirit working through you. You will confess with St. Paul: *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* (Gal 2:20 NKJV)

And this is why my prayer is that the LORD continue to work in you, through His Gospel in Word and Sacrament, every gift you need to accomplish His plans for you. And I am confident that He will. Why? Because God sent his Son to suffer and die for your sins. His resurrection declares that you are forgiven and at peace with Him. You have been reconciled to God.

And so, young brothers and sister in Christ: today does not mark the end of learning, but the beginning of applying what you learned. Never stop studying God's Word – learning more about your God's wonderful salvation and how you can share it with other people. Stay connected with Jesus through His Word and Sacraments, and you will most certainly see the LORD keep his promise to shepherd you throughout your life and accomplish the many things he has planned to accomplish for and through you. To him be all *glory forever and ever. Amen.*