

Sermon for May 19, 2013 - Pentecost/Confirmation

John 15:26-27

Theme: Listen to the Spirit.

- 1) *He will continue to teach you.*
- 2) *He will testify through you.*

*“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.*

Alex, Asia, Brooke, Emily, Samantha, and Tyler - I want to admit something to you. I am a little nervous about confirming you. Now please understand: It's not because I don't think you are ready to take communion. It's not because I don't think you know and believe the truth. Honestly - it has nothing to do with you at all.

My reason for being nervous has to do with the devil. Even though I mentioned it many, many times: "Confirmation does not equal graduation," I know that the devil will almost immediately begin to tempt you that it does. He will try to convince you that you are all grown up and know enough because you attended Sunday school for 8+ years and had confirmation for 2. The devil will try to occupy your mind with thoughts of High School and college - to the exclusion of fostering your faith. The devil will try to convince you that you don't really need to read your Bible or review your Catechism; that you don't need to join a Bible class or even come regularly to worship. And why not? Because you were just confirmed. You know it all already. Maybe later in life will be the time to review, but not now.

I am nervous about confirming you because I know how the devil works. But I also know that you are not alone in your fight against the devil. He has given you a powerful helper, who will defend you against temptation and guide you as you study God's Word. He will be with you always - calling you to repent when you sin, and comforting you with the knowledge of forgiveness when you do repent.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I don't only worry about these confirmands, I worry about all of you. This is why my encouragement for them is also encouragement for you - and that is: **Listen to the Spirit.** 1) *He will continue to teach you.* 2) *He will testify through you.*

Part One: He will continue to teach you.

Our sermon text is part of a larger "talk" that Jesus had with his disciples just a few hours before his arrest. He knew that his earthly ministry was coming to a close, so he prepared his disciples for his departure.

In preparing them, Jesus did not hold back any punches. He told them that life would be rough - that the world would hate them on account of him and try to persecute them. To the human eye it would seem as if they were left all alone - and this thought saddened the disciples. Why? If there is one thing the disciples learned from Jesus the three years they spent with him, it was this: they absolutely needed him. Without him they would be as defenseless as sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus knew this. But he also knew how important it was for his disciples for him to ascend into heaven. And this is why he gave them a special promise. He would send a Counselor - someone who would instruct, help, comfort, and intercede to God for them, just as Jesus did during his entire ministry on this earth. And who would this person be? He is called the Spirit of truth: the Holy Spirit himself.

Confirmands and congregation: the world we face is no different than the world the disciples faced: it hates the message of Christianity and those who represent it. It wants you to join it in living for yourself - following your own sinful passions. And so you are tempted. The devil allies himself with your sinful heart in making you feel too tired to go to church, too bored to listen to a sermon, too busy to go to Bible class, too distracted to read the Bible at home . . . And then the world flashes all the things you can buy before you. Yes, we seem like sheep without a shepherd. And if we are without a shepherd we will not be able to spiritually survive the 3 great wolves that entice and attack us: the devil, the world and our sinful flesh.

But the Lord does not leave us alone. The same Counselor he sent to his disciples, he has sent us also. The Holy Spirit has been your guide throughout life. How do I know? Because the Scriptures say: *no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* (1 Corinthians 12:3). In other words, if you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is your LORD and Savior from sin - you have the Holy Spirit. Without Him it would be impossible for you to come to this conviction.

But when did you receive the Holy Spirit? You received him at your baptism (cf. Titus 3:5-6). He has been with you throughout your childhood - instructing you with the truth and preparing you for life. How? Through the Bible you have been hearing in church, learning in Sunday school and Confirmation class, and which you read at home. Now, as you stand to become confirmed members of the Church, He offers you yet another tool to strengthen and protect you: Holy Communion. Through this blessed Sacrament, the Holy Spirit clothes you with Christ's body and blood and washes away all your sin by reminding you of his sacrifice on the cross. The Holy Spirit has been with you in the past and He stands ready to be with you in the future.

Again, your confirmation does not mean you are done studying the Bible. The day you stop studying it, is the day you die spiritually. Why do I say this? Because it is only in the Gospel that you find forgiveness for your sins and protection from the devil. Confirmation has nothing to do with finishing; rather, it has everything to do with starting.

Picture a person building a house. The first thing he has to do is pour the foundation and let it harden so that it is good and strong. This is what your confirmation is like. Over the past years the Holy Spirit has poured and hardened the foundation of your faith. Now it is time to build a fortress on that foundation where you can find refuge from the greater temptations and attacks that come with being an adult Christian.

Listen to the Spirit. Continue in His Word and use His sacraments. It is through these means of grace that God builds your faith and prepares you for Christian adulthood. These things are far more important than high school sports or activities. They are more important than college classes. Continue in God's Word, and you will continue to walk with God himself, all the days of your life. He himself will be your mighty fortress.

### Part Two: *He will testify through you.*

The Lord called the disciples for a purpose. He told them: *And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.*

The LORD had plans for his disciples. They learned about Jesus so that they could tell others about Him. This was Jesus' will for them. And this is Jesus' will for you too, as you stand ready to confess your saving faith before this congregation.

But what a task! As I mentioned before, the world is hostile to Christianity. The people of this world do not want to hear that they are sinful. They don't want to believe in a God who would punish them for doing the things they want to do and they certainly don't want a Savior from them. And yet it is to this very world that God wants all of us Christians to confess His saving truth. And why? Because, as the LORD himself says, *"I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live."* (Jeremiah 33:11) The LORD *wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.* (1 Timothy 2:4)

*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) If God loved the world in this way - a lost world that we were once a part of - how can we not share in our Savior's desire for people to be saved?

Yes, by the very fact that you are a Christian, you have also been called to confess Christ to the world through your words and actions. But how can we do it? We might think we don't know enough and do not have the experience to confess him. Our unbelieving families and friends might have made it clear that they don't want to hear about Jesus from our lips. They don't want us to make them feel guilty for what they believe and do. How can we confess Christ to them?

Here again is where we can rely on the Holy Spirit. How so? Listen to what Jesus promised the disciples after warning them about the persecution they would face because of the Gospel: *But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* (Matthew 10:19-20)

The Holy Spirit is also present with you as you witness to your family and friends. How do I know? Because God promises that where ever his Word is confessed, there the Holy Spirit is also - using that message for his purpose.

And here we have yet another reason to remain students of God's Word. Nowhere does Scripture promise that the Holy Spirit would work apart from his Word. If that is the case, then it's all the more important to read the Bible at home and study it together at Church. Through our study the Holy Spirit will equip us to be his witnesses. He will help you and give you the very words to say - as you speak the truth in love to your family and friends, desiring their salvation every bit as much as your own.

Confirmands and congregation - my constant prayer and hope for you is this, that you **listen to the Spirit.** Through His Gospel He will continue to teach you. As you use his Gospel He will testify through you. Amen.