

Sermon for May 22, 2016 – Holy Trinity/Confirmation

John 16:12–15 (NIV84)

Theme: God's Continuing Education Program

- 1) There's still more we need to know.
- 2) The Holy Spirit teaches us through His Word.

¹² "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

Dana, Dylan, Michael and Tanor: I've got some good news and bad news. The bad news is that you have finished your confirmation instruction. "Bad news?" you might be thinking, "How is that bad news?" Well, I didn't say it was bad news for you – it's bad for me. I'll miss having you in class. But here is the good news: as you will learn in today's sermon, you aren't done studying yet!

We went through a lot of stuff together in catechism class. But as much as you have learned, you have only scratched the service of everything Jesus wants you to know about him and his will for your life. This is why God instituted a continuing education program for his Church – one in which He wants all Christians to enroll. What is this program, and why is it important? Our sermon text will answer these questions, under the theme: **God's Continuing Education Program.** 1) *There's still more we need to know.* 2) *The Holy Spirit teaches us through His Word.*

Part One: There's still more you need to know.

One temptation Christians face after confirmation is the idea that we have learned all that we need to know in Catechism class. An older gentleman once asked me: "If I went through Sunday School and was confirmed, why do I have to keep on studying the Bible - if I already learned everything I need to know for my salvation?"

Well, the simple answer to that question is this: Jesus, your Savior and God, has much more he wants to say to you. He says so much in our sermon text for today,

Here's the situation: Jesus was gathered with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. They had spent 3 wonderful years with him – seeing his miracles and learning from his teaching.

Could you imagine going into a three-year mentoring program with Aaron Rodgers – living with him and learning to eat, drink and breathe football? I could imagine that after such a long time

of intensive study, you would think you'd have learned everything you could from him. But listen to what Jesus says in regard to his disciple's intensive study with himself: *I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.*

Jesus' earthly ministry was coming to a close. Very soon he would visibly return to his Father and the disciples would be left to carry on the work of witnessing his name on this earth. Jesus foresaw the hatred the world would have towards them because of him. Depending on where they lived, society would pressure them either to revert back to Judaism or to adopt the hedonistic practices of the pagan world. They would be dragged before princes and emperors – told that they could either deny Christ and live, or continue to confess Christ and die. Were the disciples ready for such a life? Even though Jesus did a perfect job teaching them, he knew that they weren't ready. The human brain can't grasp all knowledge at once. The disciples needed some form of continuing education.

Since yesterday was Armed Forces Day, let me use military training as an illustration to explain what I mean. Basic training is incredibly important. The training learned there keeps a soldier alive. And yet, would you say that a soldier straight out of boot camp is ready for the battlefield - that there is nothing left for him to learn? Absolutely not. There are things that only experience and a veteran soldier's mentoring can teach. Without such help, a greenhorn would have a hard time staying alive - let alone accomplishing his mission.

What is true for the soldier is true for us as well. Your Sunday school and catechetical instruction were like basic training. In this instruction you learned the truth about God: who he is and who we are in relationship to him. We are sinners who deserve God's eternal wrath and punishment, and yet *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 NIV84). You learned how God the Father sent the Holy Spirit to awaken and strengthen faith in our hearts through his means of Grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Throughout your instruction, the craftiness of our enemies (the devil, world and our sinful flesh) have been impressed upon you. Left to ourselves, we are powerless against them. But God has not left us alone. The Holy Spirit is with us. He gives us the victory as we stay close to him and his Word.

Yes, you have learned a lot in confirmation instruction, but you also haven't learned nearly enough. The hostile world that faced Jesus' original disciples faces you also. As you move on to high school and college, you too will face pressure to give up your faith and adopt the hedonistic practices of this world. Your friends and even your own flesh will tempt you day in and day out. Our American society is becoming more and more godless by the minute. You will be facing challenges to your faith that your grandparents never dreamed of. Are you really ready for this? Not without help! And this is exactly why Jesus established a continuing education program – not only for his disciples, but for all of us as well.

Part Two: The Holy Spirit teaches us through His Word.

Nothing teaches a person like hands-on experience. This is why many important jobs – like being a teacher, nurse, doctor or pastor – require some sort of internship. The great thing about

being an intern is that you have an expert mentor who can help guide you when difficult questions come your way.

After telling his disciples that there was more for them to learn Jesus promised: ¹³ *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.*

The Holy Spirit is our mentor-teacher. He was given to the disciples at Pentecost and has remained with the Church ever since.

Now please understand what the Holy Spirit is and isn't. The Holy Spirit is not some feeling inside of us or divine force that influences our will. No, he is a real person – just like the Father and the Son are – united with them in a mysterious way that we can't even begin to comprehend. The Holy Spirit is God – just as the Father is God and the Son is God. And yet there are not three God's, but one God.

Being true God, the Holy Spirit does not teach anything contrary to what the Father and Son teach. This is important to know because there are many false teachers in the world who teach dangerous doctrines that are not in the Bible. And how do they defend them? By claiming that the Holy Spirit has given them some direct insight. Could that be true – could the Holy Spirit actually teach us something new or different than what the Bible says? Absolutely not! Listen to what Jesus says regarding the Spirit:

He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ *He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.* ¹⁵ *All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.*

The Holy Spirit doesn't speak to us through our feelings. He never promised to whisper in our ear. No, the way the Holy Spirit instructs us is through His Word that He – together with the Father and the Son – had inspired holy men to write down in the Bible. As we prayerfully study the Scriptures, He opens our eyes to see and hearts to believe in Jesus as our Savior. And after we spiritually digest God's Word, the Holy Spirit then helps us apply it to our lives. He reminds us of God's promises during difficult times: that our sins are forgiven and that he will work in all things for our eternal good.

Now someone might ask: "If Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to instruct us in all things as we meditate on God's Word, why do I still struggle to understand it? Why isn't reading the Bible easy?"

Let me answer that question with an illustration: Imagine two interns studying under two different doctors. When faced with a problem, one doctor always told his intern what to do without letting him struggle to figure it out on his own. The other doctor did the opposite. He always let his intern struggle - forcing him to think things through to the end. Which doctor was the better teacher? The one who made his intern struggle. Why? Because the process of how to diagnose a problem is just as important as the solution itself. The struggle taught the intern many things that an easy answer wouldn't.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit is an expert teacher. When we have a problem, he often lets us struggle with Scripture. Why? Doesn't he know it frustrates us? He does this because He wants us to learn more than the answer to our problem. He wants us to think through God's word: living in it and making it our own. He wants us to know how to correctly interpret the Bible in a world that is constantly twisting, and changing it. The Holy Spirit lets us struggle because He wants us to learn what trusting in Jesus really means.

This is God's continuing education program: He offers us the Holy Spirit to teach, instruct and guide us in all truth. And how do we enroll in this program? We don't because Jesus has already enrolled us through Holy Baptism, when he sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts. Through every stage in life the Spirit has been with you – teaching you the things God wants you to know and believe through faithful pastors, teachers and parents. He instructs you through the means of grace. The Spirit guides you as you wrestle with God's Word.

Continue wrestling with God's Word, then. Make a plan to read your Bible. You don't have to read huge chunks – maybe start with a chapter or half chapter a day. Start with one of the Gospels. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see Christ in everything and start reading and rereading. Ask questions and search the Scriptures for God's answers. Don't just read the Bible at home, continue coming to worship and receiving Holy Communion. Join a Bible study, and learn from the experience of other Christians. This is how you can encourage each other and be encouraged. You can be confident that the Holy Spirit will instruct you through these means and guide you into all truth. He will strengthen you to be his faithful witnesses on this earth, and protect you from every evil that threatens your soul.

Tanor, Michael, Dylan and Dana: you have finished your basic training and are about to be confirmed as Christian soldiers. Rejoice in this fact - but also realize that there is still much more Jesus wants you to learn. Join both me and other members in making regular use of **God's continuing education program**: *1) There is still more we need to know. 2) The Holy Spirit teaches us through His Word. Amen*