

Sermon for May 20, 2018 – Confirmation Sunday

John 14:25–27 (EHV)

Theme: God’s Great Confirmation Gift for You.

- 1) The Holy Spirit
- 2) Peace

²⁵ *“I have told you these things while staying with you. ²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I told you.*

²⁷ *“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid.*

Aiden, Ben, Lily, Sabrina and Toni. Today is the day you make your good confession before the LORD and this congregation – confirming the faith you were baptized in and promising to remain faithful to Christ until the day you die. You will be allowed to participate in Holy Communion. And, when you get home, I am pretty sure that your family will have some cards and gifts waiting for you to help you celebrate this special day.

Speaking of gifts, I got some pretty special ones on my confirmation, like a hymnal from my parents and a Bible from my grandparents –which I still have and use to this day! But far greater and more useful than these was the special gift God gave me for my confirmation. Can you guess what it was? I will give you a hint: he actually gave me this gift at my baptism, but renewed it in me at my confirmation. Did you guess what it is? It’s the gift of the Holy Spirit – which you also received at your baptisms, and which the LORD will renew in you today as you call on his name.

With Jesus himself as our guide, let us meditate on the importance of **God’s Great Confirmation Gift for you:** 1) the gift of the Holy Spirit, 2) who grants you true and lasting peace.

Part One: The Holy Spirit.

Our sermon text finds Jesus speaking to his disciples just hours before his arrest. For the past three years they were his students, but the time for his departure was at hand. Yes, he would see them again after his resurrection from the dead, but only for a brief time – as he needed to ascend back to his Father in heaven in order to prepare a place for all believers.

Jesus knew about all the obstacles and dangers the disciples would face after his departure. Not only would the devil be constantly tempting and accusing them of sin, the world would also stand in constant opposition to their witness as their own minds would fail to remember and apply everything Jesus taught. This is why the Lord promised his disciples a special gift: the Holy Spirit. Brothers and sisters in Christ – and especially you, Aiden, Ben, Lily, Sabrina and Toni: by virtue of your baptisms, the Lord has brought you into a special relationship with himself. He has washed away all your sins and created in your hearts the faith you need to receive the benefits of his saving sacrifice on the cross for your sins. Jesus is your Lord, and you are his dearly loved disciples. Jesus

has instructed you through his called servants over the last 4 years in confirmation class and 8+ years in Sunday School. You have learned the basics of the Christian faith and are prepared to confess them.

But here's the thing: just as Jesus' enemies were waiting for the opportunity to attack his first disciples, so they are looking for opportunities to attack you. The devil will tempt you constantly – allying himself with the world to get you to doubt what you have learned. They will stop at nothing to try to either force or entice you away from your Savior. On top of this, you will start forgetting the things you learned in Catechism class and Sunday School. Why? Because you are human.

Just recently I had a conversation with another young adult. He told me that he was thinking about leaving the Church. I want all of you – especially all the parents gathered here today – to listen to what he told me.

He said: “Pastor, I was torn between what I learned in Church and school. Every day I was taught the exact opposite of what I learned in Church and that really began to wear on me. I began to think that the Church isn't doing anything for me. I was thinking this, until something happened to someone close to me. God spared him from dying. Now I am beginning to understand how important God is in my life.”

Take note of what this young man said: everyday he was told a message at school that directly contradicted what he learned at Church. And you wonder why I send my children to a Lutheran school? This is the reason! I hope you, parents, will take what this young adult said to heart, and consider sending your children to a Lutheran school as well!

And I know that you also, Aiden, Ben, Lily, Sabrina and Toni have already faced the same problems during your schooling. I'm sure you remember some discussions we had when someone in class asked about disturbing things they saw or learned in school that seemed to directly contradict what the Bible teaches. I hope you told your parents about those things too because, as I mentioned in class, they need to know about them.

But do you know what saddens me more than this? It's knowing that these problems are only going to get worse in High school, and even more worse in college. And the problem isn't just with the public schools; the entire wicked world will wear on you through popular music, movies, television shows and books. For the rest of your life, you will be constantly hearing a message that contradicts the things you have learned in confirmation class. Future friends and acquaintances will make fun of you for your faith. Trust me: this will wear on you to such a degree that, if you were left to yourself, you would lose your faith.

But thankfully you are not alone. God promised his disciples a gift – a gift he gave you as well. Jesus said: ²⁵ *“I have told you these things (the Gospel) while staying with you. ²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I told you.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ: as we read in our first lesson, Jesus fulfilled his promise to his disciples on Pentecost, when he gave the Holy Spirit to his Church. And the Holy Spirit was given to you also. When? At your baptisms, when God washed you clean of all sin, and adopted you as his child by working faith in your hearts. The Holy Spirit – who is true God himself – has been with you ever since your baptisms, working through His Word to strengthen your faith in him. And, as you prepare to become confirmed members of this congregation by making your good confession – he will renew his presence with you, giving you the courage and strength to publicly profess your faith in him.

But what about after today? The Holy Spirit will remain with you – just he remains with every believer. He promises to help you in your daily battles with the devil, world and sinful nature. He promises to both remind you of everything you have learned up to this point and teach you new things, as you gain experience in life.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is certainly with you to help you, but only if you remain in his Word. Let me repeat this again, because it is a truth that so many seem to forget: the Holy Spirit is certainly present to help you, but only if you remain in his Word and make use of His sacraments. Why? Because these are the only tools he has chosen to use, to strengthen your faith, guide you in life, and fulfill every promise Christ made concerning your salvation.

Let me illustrate what I mean: Many of you have smartphones. They are incredible tools – giving you all sorts of information and entertainment, especially as you sneak looks at them under your desk, thinking the pastor doesn't notice you doing that in confirmation class. But a smartphone will not work if the battery isn't charged. You need to plug in your smartphone often, so it is ready to be used at all times.

Your faith is like a smartphone. It is an incredible gift that receives all sorts of information and comfort from the Lord. But here's the thing: unless it's kept charged up – unless the power of the Holy Spirit is working in and through you – it is no good. That's why, just as you need to daily plug your smartphone into a wall outlet to get the power it needs to run, so also your faith needs to be regularly plugged into God's Gospel so that, through His Word and sacraments, the Holy Spirit can work his power to enliven your faith that it might work at top performance. He will give you the guidance necessary for life. Most importantly, he will direct your attention to Jesus so that you might have peace.

Part Two: Peace.

Jesus told his disciples: ²⁷ *“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid.”*

One of the ways the world will tempt you away from Christ is by offering you a false kind of peace. It says: “Leave those restrictive teachings of biblical Christianity behind. Be free. Live however you want - pursuing whatever goals you want to pursue, and doing whatever it is that your heart wants you to do. Be free from everything that makes you feel guilty and just live how you want to live . . . and you will be at peace with yourself.”

Yes, the peace the world offers certainly seems attractive: riches, ease, doing whatever we desire guilt free . . . who wouldn't want these things? But here is the truth about the peace the world offers: it's all empty. The peace the world offers is like a drug fix – keeping us from confronting the real problems of life, preventing us from enjoying the genuine happiness and peace God offers us in Christ. The Bible warns: ¹² *There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*ⁱ And again: ¹⁵ *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶ *For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, boasting about material possessions—is not from the Father but from the world.* ¹⁷ *The world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.*ⁱⁱ

But the peace God offers us is not like the empty peace of the world. It is not a temporary fix of pleasure or ease. It's not avoiding the guilt we feel in our heart or celebrating sin as some sort of freedom. No, the peace Jesus gives us is peace with God. It is the peace of knowing that God no longer holds us accountable for our sins against him, for they have all been forgiven for Christ's sake. It is the peace of knowing that God loves us, that heaven is our home, and that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The peace Jesus offers us through the Spirit is a peace that enables us to love God and our neighbor with a heartfelt genuine love – all because of what Jesus did to save us. It is a peace that moves us to live our lives to the glory of God with a hope that sustains us in every difficulty and tragedy. The peace Jesus offers us through the Spirit is a peace that drives out all fear because we are convinced that the LORD will keep his promises and deliver us home to heaven.

And that is another reason why it's so important for us to remain in God's Word by coming to Worship, joining a Bible class and having private devotions on a regular basis. These are the means the Holy Spirit uses to increase our faith in Christ and enjoy his special peace.

Aiden, Ben, Lily, Sabrina and Toni: today is your confirmation - the day you publicly proclaim your faith in Christ! Your family might have gotten you a few gifts to enjoy after the service, but regardless of what they got you, understand that the greatest gift you have received today is God's gift of the Holy Spirit. May He be your greatest treasure throughout life. Why? Because only the Holy Spirit – working through his tools of Word and Sacrament – will be able to keep you faithful to Christ – as you face the daily temptations and accusations from the devil, world and your own sinful nature. Only the Holy Spirit can grant true peace for your soul, as you meditate on the forgiveness Christ won for you on his cross, and the eternal life in heaven that awaits you – all for his mercy's sake. Amen.

ⁱ Prov. 14:12 NIV84

ⁱⁱ 1 John 2:15-17 EHV