

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Today we welcome back to Zion our confirmation reunion classes, going back as far as 75 years. Fantastic! We rejoice that you are here, but not just because you're back at Zion. Rather, we rejoice because, by all appearances, nothing has led you "*to fall away from the living God,*" but rather, that you are holding on to your "*original confidence firm to the end.*" And that's what today is about.

No doubt there will be some reminiscing about those days past. We've got some albums out in Bauer Hall to jog your memories. You might even be a bit nostalgic about those days of your youth. And yet, if you're like most people, you have to admit, those days were often filled with foolishness. You did some boneheaded things in your youth. Even the younger reunion attendees might agree with the saying: "Youth is wasted on the young."

George Bernard Shaw is reported to have said that or something very similar. But what exactly is meant by that little quip? I think, perhaps, it conveys an understanding that young people seem to have boundless energy and zeal, but they often lack wisdom and squander their time on frivolous activities—that's easier than ever with these little devices we carry around all the time. Nevertheless, I think we'd agree that youth often exhibit an idealism that, coupled with their zeal, makes for big changes in society—not always for the good.

A man came up to Jesus in our text today, and Matthew's parallel account tells us that he was young. He asked Jesus a question, for this young man was idealistic, zealous, motivated, energetic. He wanted to do something.

And that's great as far as it goes. We need that in the church. We need people in the church who want to do—young and old alike—who want to bear fruit, who want to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick or in prison. We need people in the church who are "*doers of the word, and not hearers only,*" as St. James says (James 1:22). We need people in the church who hear God's word and not only believe it, but also put it into practice, loving the household of faith, loving our neighbors—doing in response to our salvation having been done.

But that's where we encounter the problem in this young man's question. It's not that he wanted to do in response to the message of the Gospel, the message of God's grace to save him, the message that Jesus proclaimed: repentance, forgiveness, believing in the Son, eternal life, and resurrection through faith in Him. No, this young man wanted his doing to count for something with regard to His salvation.

But remember, our salvation is not a 50-50 proposition. It's not "get me started, God, by your grace, and then let me work the rest of the way on my own!" No, "*if [our salvation] is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace,*" St. Paul says (Rom. 11:6). And again, and you

remember it: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of [your] works”* (Eph. 2:8-9).

But this young man wanted to DO *“in order that [he] might inherit eternal life.”* You can hear the problem, can’t you? What do you DO to inherit? Nothing! Rather, you must BE to inherit. You must be in the will! You must be an heir!

So how does one become an heir? Certainly with man, one possibility would be that you can work your way into the good graces of the testator, and so be named in the will. And, well, you’d have to be pretty special, in human terms, to do that. But apparently that is what this young man thought with respect to God: *“I’m pretty special, God; I’m a pretty good guy.”*

Jesus corrected his too generous opinion of himself. The young man had called Jesus *“Good Teacher,”* and Jesus retorted, *“Why do you call me good? No one is good except one, and that’s God.”* *“That means, it’s not YOU.”* And so Jesus began to lead him to that same conclusion by what He said next.

*“Well, what do the commandments say?”* Again, the young man was still too generous with his self-assessment — and that often happens when outwardly moral people just consider the 2<sup>nd</sup> table of the law: *“don’t murder; don’t commit adultery; don’t steal; don’t give false testimony; etc.,”* especially when they consider these commandments too narrowly — unlike the way Jesus explains them in His Sermon on the Mount, or the way Luther does as he explains the commandments: *“What does this mean?”* Keeping the commandments is not just about refraining from some outward action, but it’s doing the helpful thing, and with the right attitude, too. We poor sinners break these commandments in thought and word, not just deed! And yet, the man said, *“No problem, Jesus. I’ve done them all without fail ever since I was a kid.”*

Jesus didn’t correct him. It’s as if He was saying, *“That’s great!”* And in a way, it is great. We want moral Christians. We want Christians to act with justice and righteousness. We want Christians to love as we have been first loved. It’s just that that doesn’t cut it before God — not for salvation. Thus Jesus lovingly took him where he did not want to go ... to the First Commandment. Jesus loved him and said: *“Just one more thing ... sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”*

That did it. That showed where this young man’s heart was. His heart was on earthly treasure and not on *“treasure in heaven.”* He recognized that he wasn’t as good as all that after all. No, it would not be by his good works that he would inherit anything. And, in fact, that’s just as St. Paul says, isn’t it: *“the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law ...”* for *“the law brings wrath”* (Rom. 4:13, 15). And *“through the law comes knowledge of sin”* (Rom. 3:20). Therefore, a Divine inheritance by keeping the law is out.

So, how else does one inherit? It's obvious ... by being ... by being sons, God's children by faith. It's by being born into the family of God, "*born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you*" (1 Pet. 1:3-4). And that promise leads us to baptism as St. Paul says, "*in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise*" (Gal. 3:26, 27, 29). Again, "*when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life*" (Tit. 3:4-7).

Baptism is the Spirit's work in our lives, to work faith when and where it pleases God. It's as St. Paul says again: "*all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God*" and the "*Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God*" (Rom. 8:14, 16). That's what we affirm in confirmation: that God has begun this good work in us, and we pray that He would keep us firm in that "*original confidence ... to the end*" for not even those whom Moses led out of Egypt were able to enter the promised rest without faith.

Truly, whether zealous youth or wise senior, "*it is [not] the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, [for that would make] faith ... null and the promise ... void.*" Rather "*it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all [Abraham's] offspring*" (Rom. 4:14, 16). And that's who you are in Christ, THE Son, THE heir, who was killed at the hands of wicked men. Indeed, because this Son is God, He is good, and His Godly goodness was expressed through His perfect life as a man, through His fulfilling the law as we ordinary mortals could not do, and through Him, as a man, taking on our punishment. Moreover, His goodness, His righteousness, has now become ours, received through the washing of water and the word, received by His bestowal of forgiveness, received as we eat and drink the fruits of His perfect sacrifice for us. We are heirs of eternal life — not because of our DOING, but because of our BEING sons.

We give thanks to God for promising us this inheritance in Christ to young and old alike. We rejoice with our catechumens being instructed in the faith and don't think that their youth is being wasted at all. Indeed, we pray that God would grant our young catechumens wisdom and all our "old" confirmands youthful zeal and energy to labor today in the Father's vineyard as sons, and at length receive our promised eternal inheritance.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.