

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

You well know we spend a lot of time in the Gospels. From the time I exited the seminary, at Dr. Scaer's urging, that's normally the main text for the Sunday preaching. The Old Testament lesson is a gem; the Epistle, too. They generally support the Gospel message and help us to understand the big picture of salvation; I often reference them in the sermon; but I generally preach on the Lord's words and the Lord's deeds on the Lord's Day.

Today is an exception that proves that rule. Today, I want to preach mainly using the Epistle lesson. It's a special day; Jaxon is being confirmed. The Epistle, I think, intersects nicely with a confirmation theme.

Today, Jaxon will make some affirmations and promises. He will join the rest of us who have done the same in the past and who daily affirm these truths with our mouths and these promises with our bodies. The affirmations touch Holy Baptism. Baptism, not confirmation, is actually the big deal; confirmation looks backward to Baptism and affirms what Baptism did. Thus, today Jaxon will "acknowledge the gifts that God gave [him] in [his] Baptism" (Rite of Confirmation, LSB272ff).

Foremost among those baptismal gifts is "*the gift of the Holy Spirit,*" as St. Peter preached, who by the Gospel calls us to faith in Christ Jesus. "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38). This faith is "*the calling to which [we all] have been called,*" to "*believe in him whom [God] has sent,*" Jesus Christ, our Lord, to be united with Him in His body the Church: one holy Christian and apostolic Church, brought into the one body by the one Spirit.

Jaxon learned it going through class, but he confessed it a week ago Saturday. This faith was not his own doing. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith" (Small Catechism, Apostles' Creed, Third Article). And his confirmation verse acknowledges the same: "*'Who then can be saved?' ... 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'*" (Matt. 19:25b, 26b).

Yes, the Holy Spirit began a good work in Jaxon at his baptism, enlightening him in the truth and calling him to the true faith ... faith in the Holy Trinity as you, Jaxon, will confess again shortly through the Apostles' Creed: that there is "*one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*"; that there is "*one Lord,*" our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of the Father, very God Himself, begotten, not made; and there is one Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. "[T]he Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord; and yet there

are not three Lords, but one Lord” (Athanasian Creed, 17-18). *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one”* (Deut. 6:4).

This is the one true faith that the Holy Spirit keeps the whole Christian church in, the *“one faith”* into which we were all once baptized but now live in fealty to Him — *“I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no God”* (Isa. 45:5) — and to His command: *“You shall have no other gods ...”* (Deut. 5:7).

Part of that fealty is to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, to acknowledge that He is God and we are not, casting aside the Garden temptation: *“you will be like God”* (Gen. 3:5). And then to follow in the path that He marks out for us. That path took Him from the Father’s side down in humility to earth, being born in our flesh received from His mother Mary. We call that the incarnation, right Jaxon? It’s an important part of the story of our salvation, for in this flesh He fulfilled the law and the prophets, every iota, every dot (Matt. 5:17-18). And in this flesh Jesus took on sin’s punishment for sinful men, submitting to the death of the cross (1 John 2:2; Phil. 2:8).

Therefore, that path is also our path ... no, not the cross, but *“to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called”* — you’ve been called to faith in Christ Jesus — so walk like Him *“with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ... maintain[ing] the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* Paul says it this way to the Philippians: *“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus ...”* (Phil. 2:3-5).

But walking in this manner does not come naturally to sinners. That’s why they are reborn into Christ, made new creations in baptismal waters. And that’s why they need continually to be equipped and trained and built up in the ways of Jesus. Christians, young and old alike, need continually to grow in the knowledge of Jesus, God’s Son, in pure doctrine, in truth and love.

It’s why God provided apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers — for us, for our growth in the things of God even as we grow up in stature and grow older in years. We all know how easily children can be duped by people with evil intent. It’s the duty of parents to keep them safe and set them straight when they stray. And it’s the duty of the church and her pastors and teachers to do the same for all the flock as St. Paul exhorted the pastors in Ephesus: *“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing*

*the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).*

That’s why you’ve been instructed, Jaxon, and why we call on you today, no longer as a child but a young adult, to make some promises: “Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord’s Supper faithfully?” “Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?” “Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?” Will you partake of those things that God gives, whereby you grow and mature, and attain *“to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”*? No longer a child but a man? Will you root yourself firmly in these gifts of God, so that you’re not bending this way and that in the winds of false doctrine? Because false teachers are crafty and deceitful. Therefore, beware!

You will answer these questions today, Jaxon, for yourself, acknowledging your own fleshly weakness, and trusting in God’s mercy. You’ll answer “I do, by the grace of God.” We’ve answered the questions in the same way, and by that grace we are still here receiving God’s instruction, growing in knowledge, being built up in love, laboring not *“for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man [gives] to [us].* We welcome you to the same.

We’re not perfect. We sin plenty. But in Christ, we repent, we forgive, we love, we serve, and we rejoice that we have been brought into this one Body by the one Spirit. For therein is our hope — not in our deeds but in our calling, in our justification, and ultimately in our glorification. Lord, keep us all in this faith to the end and give us the crown of everlasting life.

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