

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We welcome today all of our confirmation reunion attendees—our honored anniversary classes. We're glad you're here. Welcome back. And in one sense, we know why you're here. We invited you for this reunion. But you didn't have to come; not everyone came. Why did you come? To see your old church, school, neighborhood? To see what things have changed and what looks the same? To see old friends and reminisce about the times you had at Zion?

What about those who are missing? What has happened to them? Are they alive or dead? Are they too far away to be able to come? Or too busy? Or, are they missing because this is a CONFIRMATION reunion and they no longer confess that confirmation faith—they have fallen away from that faith that they confessed, even though they, like you, promised “to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it”? Are they even Christians any more? Have they not only departed from this confession but also from the simple creedal faith in “God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” even though they promised “to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to [the Triune God] even to death”?

As you think back, oh how easy those promises were to make back then. You were all excited to be confirmed, to receive the Lord's Supper the first time. You had passed your examination—you knew “*the faith once for all delivered to the saints*” [Jude 3]. You probably had the support of your parents and family, and more than that, you had the implicit support of society. Even as few as 25 years ago, although there were cracks in the foundation, our world was still pretty much supportive of Christians. How different today. Today, Christianity's enemies scoff at us, and unbelievers revile the name of the Lord. Even the government these days, it seems, wants to deliver us over to the wild beasts. Christians must not bow down to Jesus, or the Holy Trinity, but to the god of our age or be thrown into the fiery furnace. “[D]eep-seated cultural codes, religious beliefs and structural biases” contained in our Holy Scriptures—beliefs that we confessed in confirmation and continue to confess to this day—“have to be changed,” we're told, to “doctrines and commandments and precepts developed out of the sexual revolution of the 1960s” [Mary Eberstadt, *It's Dangerous to Believe*].

Why do our young people struggle so growing up? Even with the faith? Consider the world — a neo-pagan world — that they're growing up in. Lord, have mercy on them. But don't be fooled. We are all affected by it. Is it any wonder, then, that Jesus sets this question before His disciples at the end of our Gospel: “*when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*”

Your confirmation answer provides the answer to that question. Do you remember? “Do you intend to remain faithful,” you were asked? “Do you will it”?

“I do [intend] **by the grace of God.**” Yes, it is by the grace of God and by His grace alone that He will find faith.

Of course, most often we ascribe this particular work to the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, Who “*works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news*” [Augsburg Confession, V], for we know “*no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit*” [1 Corinthians 12:3]. But, of course, one can also ascribe it to the Father who draws us to the Son [John 6:44]; or one can ascribe this work to the Son, “*Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,*” [Hebrews 12:2].

All that shows that this work is Trinitarian, for even as the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, so the Spirit working through the Word brings forth faith and preserves us in this faith. Do you remember how you said it long ago when you recited Luther’s explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed: “The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

It’s how God works; it’s how He bestows His grace: by the water and the Word [Ephesians 5:25-27] pouring over you, the Holy Spirit there as gift, forgiving you, sanctifying you, giving you faith, making you a part of the Church. Your faith was nurtured, even from childhood, as you became “*acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,*” and you learned them and believed them firmly. And into adulthood, by hearing the preached word and eating Jesus’ holy body and blood, God is bestowing upon you His grace, that you might hold fast to “*the truth and not wander off into myths.*”

But oh how easy it is to develop a case of “*itching ears*” that want their own passions to be indulged, that do not want to “*endure sound teaching.*” For let’s face it: the way of the Lord is hard. Jesus says it: “*For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life*” [Matthew 7:14]. And sound teaching must be endured — it will be unpopular often—often “*out of season.*” Even you may have to wrestle with it, as Jacob did.

You can understand why Jacob did. God told him something unpleasant. “*Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good*” [Genesis 32:9]. But how could any good come out of this, for Esau hated Jacob for stealing both his birthright and his blessing? Nevertheless, Jacob trusted God’s word, and God did do good for Jacob. He and his brother Esau were reconciled, and Jacob was blessed by God, for he refused to let the Lord go and clung to Him.

What are your wrestlings with God? Do you struggle between His way and your own way? Do your ears itch for new teachings, new methods, new techniques that fall in line with the orthodoxy of the new sexual ethics? Do you wish Lutheran

pastors would preach and teach more in line with popular prosperity preachers? Do you feel shame by our insistence on following the Scriptures rather than chasing after the latest sexual aberrations? Do you “lose heart” at the Lord’s apparent slowness in answering your prayers, or delivering justice?

The wrestling is understandable. Our flesh is weak. Do not let God go; cling to Him. The wrestling is understandable. There are people in our lives, even judges, that “*neither fear God nor respect man.*” Don’t lose heart; keep on praying. Don’t let go of Jesus. “*God [will] give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night.*” He “*will give justice to [you] speedily.*”

Therefore, you confirmation classes, and indeed all of us who have “*made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses,*” “*[f]ight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called*” [1 Timothy 6:12]. Don’t just start the fight or start the race, but get to the final bell; get to the finish line. Finish the race, keeping the faith. You may wrestle with God. Wrestle to the end and do not let go of Him, for you know who it was that Jacob wrestled with: the one described as both man and God.

That was as it had to be, for although Jacob saw “*God face to face*” and lived, yet we know that sinful man cannot see God in unmasked glory and live [Exodus 33:17-23]. Therefore, Jacob strove with the God who veiled Himself in flesh. Indeed, I believe that Jacob saw the same Son of God who became flesh and dwelt among us [John 1:14], that we might be delivered, that we might prevail. And we do prevail when we cling to this Son of God and Son of Man—hidden by cross and death—who strove with Satan and won the victory over sin and death for us. We prevail, even as we struggle with questions and doubt, when we ask the Lord to help us, to put us on the right path again and bless us. We prevail when we cling to our baptism and the Triune name placed upon us there at the font. We prevail when we cling to the knowledge that our God is no unjust judge, but that, through Christ, He is the One who is both just and the justifier of all who put their faith in Him, and then when we persist in our prayers to God, trusting that He will give us justice against our adversary. We prevail when we cling to God’s word in the sacred writings that “*are able to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,*” that is, when we listen to the reproof and correction and warnings contained in Holy Scripture and when we cling to the Gospel message of Jesus’ cross and resurrection as God’s power to save us. We prevail when we continue to remember our baptisms, our confirmation vows (and verses), when we continue to come to be absolved, to hear the preaching of Christ, and eat Christ’s body and blood, when we pray fervently and persistently, trusting in His mercy.

“*When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?*” Yes, as we cling to Christ and His means of grace. Don’t lose heart.

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