

“Faithful Even to Death”

John 12:20-43

Last week, we heard of how the chief priests and Pharisees knew that Jesus was actually from God or at least was a prophet of God, but they wanted to kill Him anyway, because they wanted to keep things just the way they were. Only Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea made public their faith in Christ, and that was only after He was dead. Today, in John’s Gospel, we hear that “many of the authorities believed in Him,” but feared what would happen to them if they made their faith known.

In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we hear St. Paul exhort all people to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and to give glory to God the Father. “At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” The reality is that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. The only question is “when?” If that does not happen until the Day of Judgment, it will be too late.

That is why we have gathered here today. Not only so that we can confess our faith in God, once again hear the Good News of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of sin, and receive the sure promise of eternal life and salvation found in Christ’s Body and shed Blood. But we have also gathered together because these three children of God are going to confirm the faith of their Baptism, and they are going to

publicly confess their faith in the one True God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This confession of faith is an important step in their growth as Christians. When they were baptized as infants, there were sponsors who answered the questions for them and confessed on their behalf that Jesus Christ is Lord. Their sponsors, their godparents spoke for them and confessed their faith in God in the words of the Apostle's Creed. Now that they have grown up in that Baptismal faith, now that they have studied God's Word and the teachings drawn from that Word as it is presented in Luther's Small Catechism, today each of them are going to make a public confession of their faith and a lifelong pledge to be faithful to Christ and His Church.

They are going to make the same pledge of faith that I made and most of you made when we were their age. After they have stated the words of the Apostle's Creed, reaffirming the faith created in them at their Baptism, I will ask them several questions.

I will ask them: "Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the Divine Word, to be faithful in the use of God's Word and sacraments, which are his means of grace, and in faith, word, and action to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?" And they will answer: "I do, by the grace of God."

This is a very important question. This is a question that many of the people in Jerusalem, in Jesus' day, were unwilling to answer. Many of them liked Jesus and believed He was from God, however, they did not want their faith to cause them any inconveniences.

If you are focusing your attention on God only when it is convenient for you; if you are gathering for worship only when it is convenient for your schedule, you are rejecting the confession of faith made at your confirmation. The body and blood of the Son of God, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins is offered here each week. Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of Me." It is here that God gives you forgiveness, life, and salvation. If this is not of the highest priority, then you are rejecting the confession of faith made at your confirmation.

Whether you are making your vow before the Lord today, or whether you made that vow many decades ago, the highest priority in this life is participating in the glory that comes from God. And the glory that comes from God is seen in the Son of God lifted up upon the cross, pouring out His blood, and enduring the judgment you and I deserved.

Last week in Bible class, we were reading Paul's words from Romans 5 as Paul reminds his readers of what a tremendous gift it is that Christ entered this world to suffer the death that Adam and his children deserved. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." "We have been justified by His blood . . . saved by Him from the wrath of God." And all of this while we were still His enemies. It is beyond our wildest expectation of how we would imagine the Almighty God to be.

The Son of God leaves the glory of the heavenly realm so that He can bring healing to the nations. So that he can bring peace to those who hate Him. So that He can open the eyes of those who are blind to the truth, whose hearts are hardened. Our Lord wants every knee to bow and every tongue confess Him as Lord and be saved. Even from the cross, Jesus

says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

So today I will ask these three, and I will ask all of you again, “Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the Divine Word, to be faithful in the use of God’s Word and sacraments, which are his means of grace, and in faith, word, and action to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?” I know these three, in a few minutes, will answer: “I do, by the grace of God.” What is your answer?

Although the wording may have changed a little over the years, this is a question that has been asked of those hungering and thirsting for the body and blood of Christ since the earliest days of the Christian church.

This one question encompasses everything that Confirmation is about. Confirmation is not just about doing memory work or passing tests. Confirmation is not some hoop that the Church makes a person jump through. Confirmation is not a graduation ceremony that ends your relationship with Luther’s Catechism.

Confirmation Day is when a baptized Christian publicly announces that they would rather suffer death than to fall away from faithfully coming to hear God’s Word and receive His Sacrament, because being without God’s Word and the body and blood of Jesus leads to a fate worse than death.

Jesus entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday thinking about you. You were His highest priority. He poured out His blood as the ransom price for your slavery to sin, to rescue you from the depths of death and hell. Jesus says, “when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.” Amen.