

“I Do So Intend, With the Help of God”
I Samuel 12:20-24,
Reformation and Confirmation Sunday, November 2, 2014

Beloved of the Lord....In the Lutheran Church we have the good practice of catechism instruction and confirmation. Though God does not really command either one, He does command us that before communion we examine ourselves. “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” This is why we dare not let anyone commune at our altar who is unable to examine themselves (and this is why everyone should announce before communing). If a person is not truly sorry for their sins, or they have no desire to amend their sinful ways and they continue in their sin, they will eat and drink damnation to themselves, “not discerning the Lord’s body.” That is why before communion we should examine ourselves to see, “A. whether we truly repent of our sins; B. Whether we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, and C. Whether we have the good and earnest purpose with the aid of God the Holy Spirit henceforth to amend our sinful lives.” This is why when we have a confirmation in our church, we also hear the believer confess their faith in Christ and the Holy Trinity, and likewise they renounce the devil and all his evil works and ways. This is also why we say “I do so intend with the help of God”, for without Jesus we can do nothing.

That brings us to the two main themes which should be in every confirmation sermon, namely ADMONITION and ENCOURAGEMENT. Regarding admonition...for the sake of our own salvation God wants every confirmand to take their vows seriously and hold fast and faithful to Jesus Christ so the devil does not lead us astray. Don’t follow the crowd for they are racing towards damnation. Jesus said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Mt. 7 The first ten years after confirmation are very tempting. The world with all its beauty will tempt you away from church and begin to pull you away from God’s Word, if you let it. Don’t fall away from Christ by committing fornication as so many do, living with their girlfriend or boyfriend to their own damnation. Likewise be careful of the company you keep. James writes, “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” Also beware of higher education, which often is ungodly. We are free to go to college of course, but understand most professors are unbelievers and their clever arguments are designed to destroy faith and exalt man’s pride and life. I have heard such arguments myself and I know their voice.

Though our world thus is very deceitful, we still have every reason to be encouraged as we continue down the narrow way. Let every confirmand rejoice Jesus is always with them. “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” When you are confirmed God does not push you out of the nest and say “Good luck! Your on your own!” For our comfort and also our strength God has therefore given to His Church what we call the Means of Grace, namely Gospel preaching, Baptism and Holy Communion. If you don’t want to fall in love with the world and out of love with Christ, stay close to these Means of Grace. Commune often to obtain strength for a holier life. Remember your baptism

whereby God washed you clean of your sins and gave you His comforting Spirit. Keep yourself also in God's Word by family devotions, and private Bible study. "Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Scriptures." Certainly God does not want us to live in constant fear of falling away. Instead He gives us many promises of strength and comfort, "Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you."

I. All Christians are to fear the Lord. These words were spoken by Samuel when the Israelites wanted a king to rule over them. They had rejected God's rule by His prophets, and wanted to be like other countries which had kings. Their sin was covetousness, and God's Tenth Commandment says "Thou shalt not covet....anything that is thy neighbor's." By way of the prophet Samuel God revealed His wrath against the people for the coveting. In the middle of wheat harvest "the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel." Fearing for their lives the people repented of asking God for a king, and this is when Samuel comforted them saying, "Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart." In other words, God had put away their sins, forgiven them, but now they should return their hearts to the Lord and sincerely amend their sinful ways.

Samuel continues "God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart..." Our first question now is, just how is it that Christians are to FEAR THE LORD? Our catechism answers "We fear God above all things when with our whole heart we revere Him as the highest Being, honor Him with our lives, and avoid what displeases Him." Those who fear God keep His commandments and tremble at the thought of breaking them. For example when Potiphar's wife tried to lead Joseph in adultery, Joseph answered "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" The thought of sinning against God was offensive to Joseph's heart. Likewise when Goliath challenged the armies of Israel, thus mocking the true God, young David was enraged because Goliath did not fear God nor stand in awe of Him. On the battlefield David said to Goliath, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel." It was God then who killed Goliath by the hand of David, for this was a matter of God's name, God's honor, so sinners would repent and find salvation in Christ. So the Bible says, "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him." Likewise the Lord says in Proverbs 8:13, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate." Goliath fell because he was a proud sinner who didn't repent. David lived because he was a repentant sinner. If we then truly fear God,

we hate evil and we hate our sins, yet in Christ we find comfort. Only those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved, but all else will perish.

II. Consider all the “great things he hath done for you.” There is another way however, in which we revere God, or stand in awe of Him. That is when we look at the Son of God, Jesus Christ, our Savior. The great Reformation for example, which God brought about by Martin Luther, could never had happened unless the Holy Spirit revealed to Luther all the great things the Son of God did for him. It was Luther who wrote in the Second Article “Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.” These were the great things Luther knew God had done for him. Knowing the same Luther wrote in the Third Article, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

Indeed isn't that why we are here today, because each one of us has heard the call of the Gospel? Weren't we also born of water and Spirit long ago...born again...born from above? Didn't God's Spirit long ago enlighten us with His gifts of faith? Isn't confirmation nothing more than a repeat of our baptismal vow? Isn't it certain God's Spirit will also keep us tomorrow? Though it is indeed an evil and deceitful world where the devil leads many astray, each confirmand can still be bold and fearless like those prophets, David, Luther or Samuel! Hasn't God said “Certainly I will be with thee!” Didn't Jesus once say “I am the Bread of Life” and “I am the Light of the world” and “I am the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep!” Knowing all the wonderful promises of God, you must learn then by faith to picture yourself in the strong arms of your Good Shepherd Jesus Christ. As Luther said “He's by our side upon the plain”. You are not alone in this battle, and “ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. Indeed there is really only one passage each confirmand needs as they face the world ahead of them, and this is words of Jesus in John ten. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” Those who build their faith upon Christ, built upon a Rock, for Christ is that Rock. He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.

Knowing Christ is your beloved Rock, the prophet Samuel writes, “serve [the Lord] in truth with all your heart.” You have your whole life ahead of you, and you know Christ has redeemed both your body and soul. Use then both your body and soul which are God's gifts, to God's glory. Love Him with all your heart, as He loves you with all His heart. “Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.” Ps. 100:2

Though it is doubtful any of us have all the gifts God gave Luther, God still gives each of His dear children, many precious gifts. Be fruitful then with the life God has given you. Keep His commandments and live to His glory. When Luther understood that he was justified by faith alone without the deeds of the law, the gates of paradise were open before him. These same gates are open before you today and tomorrow leading unto life everlasting. Knowing “Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” And let every believer answer, “I do so intend, with the help of God.” Amen.