

Trinity Sunday (Confirmation)



Text: John 3:1 - 17 (NIV)

¹Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” ³In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” ⁴“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” ⁵Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” ⁹“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹²I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Theme: God’s Gift of His Son for You

When I was in 5th or 6th grade, I remember hearing what the sister of what of my friends received for confirmation. It was over \$100. It was an amount beyond my imagination at the time. Recently I heard that kids in Germany get the equivalent of about \$2,500 dollars for confirmation. Most of us had a time when someone gave us a large or special gift. It might have been for our confirmation, a special birthday, our wedding, Christmas or a special anniversary of some kind. Many people have given gifts to us, and hopefully we have also been generous at various times, but on this Trinity and confirmation Sunday, we celebrate the greatest gift of all. That is God’s gift of His Son for us.

I. The greatest gifts that we have ever received are those that filled our greatest needs.

A few months ago an off duty Milwaukee policeman gave me a great gift. I was sitting with my car at a Walgreen’s parking lot late at night because it had overheated. He stopped and went to buy a gallon of antifreeze for me. When I offered to pay him for it, he wouldn’t take any money. It was an act of kindness that I will never forget. I also remember a time when I was in college. I was trying to figure out how I would survive to the end of the year and have enough gas money to return home. Then suddenly one day a check arrived in the mail. There were a few families in my home congregation who suddenly decided to send me a check for \$75, which was exactly what I needed. They had no way of knowing that I needed that much money. It was a miracle of God that I will never forget.

Our greatest need however is life. When we are young, we are full of vigor and energy. But already in our late 20's we notice that we have lost a little bit of that energy. It doesn't take long until we also begin to notice that we will not live forever. There are friends and relatives that we lose in this life. We find that there are things that we can't do anymore like we used to. Soon we are on medication for something. We find that life itself is fleeting. But there is even a greater need, and that is the threat of eternal death. When we are honest, we realize that we are sinners. We like to hide our sins, deny them or to excuse them. But when we are honest with ourselves, we realize that none of us are perfect. There are times when we have done things that are obviously wrong, but like Nicodemus there are times when we seem to have been good, but there is still sin in our lives that we do not see. The words that Jesus said to Nicodemus also apply to us, *"Truly, truly, I saw to you, unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* Heaven is closed to us because of our sins. After this life all that would await us is God's condemnation and eternal judgement.

II. But God has given us the gift of life in His Son.

On Trinity Sunday we celebrate that gift. The Father gave us the gift. Jesus said, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave His one and only Son...For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."* God saw our need. He loved us so much, that He could not bear to see us condemned to hell for all of eternity. It was the Father, who gave the gift. We celebrated that a few months ago at Christmas. Christmas is the festival when we celebrate God's gift of a Savior. The angel proclaimed to the shepherds, *"Unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."*

Jesus is the gift. He told Nicodemus, *"God gave His one and only Son."* He was completely obedient to His Father's will, both in that He never sinned, but also that He offered His innocent life on the cross in our place. It was just a few weeks ago that we remembered the price that Jesus paid for our salvation. He was betrayed, beaten, and nailed to a cross. Everyone mocked Him. Even His Father withdrew His loving presence from Him. He suffered all of God's wrath. He suffered hell, and then the sinless Son of God died. But as we celebrated on Easter, He rose from the dead. He is the firstborn of all the dead. He suffered, died, and rose from the dead in order to defeat sin, death, and all the power of the devil. He is the gift.

The Holy Spirit is like the gift tag. People often understand what the work of the Father and the Son is. The Father gave His Son, and the Son gave His life and rose from the dead. But they often wonder what the work of the Holy Spirit is. What does He have to do with our salvation? He is very much like the gift tag that has your name on it. He tells you that Jesus came for Me. He gave His life on the cross for the forgiveness of My sins. He rose that I will also rise to eternal life. He convicts our hearts to believe that Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father, ruling all things for the good of all of God's people. It was just last week that we celebrated the Festival of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came on the apostles that they could proclaim Christ and that through their message many people would believe in Him. Peter proclaimed on that day, *"Repent and be baptized everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Without the Holy Spirit, Jesus would have died for nothing. But the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel and through baptism and the Lord's Supper to bring us to confess our sins and believe in Jesus as our Savior. He brings us to believe that Jesus died and rose for me. When we have that faith, we are born again. We are born of water and the Spirit. It is through baptism and faith in

Christ that the Holy Spirit gives us that new birth as children of God.

III. What will you do with that gift?

The three young men who will be confirmed today have been given that gift. Your parents brought you to the baptismal font when you were a baby. They made sure that you have heard God's Word by bringing you to Sunday School. They taught you how to pray. They brought you to confirmation class and made sure that you did your work for these last two years. They looked forward to the day when you would join them at this altar to receive our Lord's body and blood.

Others have shown you by their example how important the gift of live through Jesus is. For each one of you, I can think of an example of faith within your own family. Joshua lost his grandfather just a couple of weeks ago. He was a pastor, who dedicated his life to the preaching of the Gospel. It was a few years ago that Bryce lost his great grandfather, Calvin Dallman, who was one of the founders of this church, whom we remembered last Sunday. People still speak of him so fondly in this congregation as a man of faith and service to his family and God. Daniel also lost his Opa a few years ago. He was a man whose greatest desire for his children was that they knew Jesus Christ as their Savior. He had a son who is a pastor, a daughter who is a pastor's wife, and two other sons who are very active in their church. These three men were gifts that God gave to each of you as an example of what a precious gift God has given to us in giving us His Son. They were men of faith, who left an example of faith for you.

There are times when we are given gifts, and we don't appreciate them. I remember a time when I was a child, and my grandparents bought a gift for me from their vacation. I still feel bad today that I didn't like it, and actually broke it. There are many people who hear about God's gift of His Son, but they don't care, and some who even despise the gift. There can be nothing worse than despising the greatest gift that anyone has ever given to you. God gave His Son Jesus gave His life in your place, and the Holy Spirit has revealed that this gift is for you. How could you ever say, "No thanks."

On the other hand, there is so much peace and joy when we know Christ as our Savior. That same grandmother gave me another gift for my high school graduation. It was an orange blanket from Mexico. I used it throughout college, and occasionally today, such as at the spring youth retreat. That old blanket is still precious to me today because of who gave it to me. Many people do reject Jesus, but to those who know Him as their Savior, He is the precious cornerstone of our lives. Our lives are built on Him. We rejoice in His forgiveness, His presence, His peace, His promise to deliver us from every evil, but especially the sure hope of everlasting life through Him.

There are many people who give us great gifts. We thank them and show our appreciation. Often we remember that gift for many years to come. But no gift is as great as the gift of God's Son for you. May His good Spirit always keep you in that faith that Jesus Christ is your Savior, that you may receive the gift of eternal life that He came to bring. Amen.

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