

## ***Confirmation 2014***

### **Text: John 17:8**

I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me.

### **Theme: God's Word Is the Greatest Gift of All**

Dear confirmands,



The two of you have been given a great gift. God has blessed you with parents who have loved you dearly. They have sacrificed a lot for you. They might not be the richest or most famous parents in the world, but I have never seen you go hungry or lack anything that you needed.

But there is one thing that your parents have done, which has been an especially great gift. They have made sure that you have heard and learned God's Word. I have known you both for a long time, and I think that I have gotten to know both of you pretty well. That is because you have been here often ever since you were both little kids. You both attended Lutheran Schools, and next year you will be on your way to Milwaukee Lutheran. For two years, you had the pleasure of sitting in my confirmation class and learning a second time many of the things that you learned at Zion Lutheran School.

My guess is that there were Sundays when you didn't feel like getting up, and even Sundays when your parents didn't feel like dragging you to church. It wasn't always pleasant to learn your memory work or do you confirmation or religion homework, but that Word of God that you have received and which you will continue to learn is the greatest gift of all.

I. God's Law is a blessing in disguise.

At first it is not pleasant to hear. It often tells us that things that we like to do are things that we should stay away from. When you were small, there were many things that looked tempting to do, that your parents told you to stay away from. "Don't touch that, it's hot!" "Don't play in the street." "Stay out of the deep water." There were other things that they told you to do, and you resisted, like. "Take my hand."

Those were minor temptations compared with the temptations that will soon come into your lives. You might think that you are pretty street smart now, but there are more wicked and cruel things in this world that you can ever imagine. Soon you will be tempted by things that seem so inviting. Just like Eve in the garden of Eden, they won't seem as bad as everyone said. You will even think that you can learn a little from it. But when we live to fulfill every desire of our passions and lusts, those things will soon consume us. One of the hardest things for me as a pastor is to work with someone who should have known better, who made a mess of their own lives by following their sinful passions and desires rather than God's Word.

But how blessed you are when you receive that word and believe it. It becomes a guide to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. A lot of people will tell you that you can have a lot more fun if you don't take the Bible so seriously. They will be like the devil when he tempted Eve and twisted God's Word to make evil things seem good. But when you receive God's Word and take it to heart, you can be like Joseph who said to Potiphar's wife, "*How can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?*"

God's Word teaches us to be kind, compassionate and forgiving, just as God in Christ forgave us. It tells us

to love one another as Christ has loved us. It tells us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. It teaches us how to live a blessed and happy life.

But we all have to confess that we are not perfect. We have all sinned in thought, word, and deed. Like King David, we have sinned against the Lord. God's Word teaches us not to hide our sin, deny it or excuse it, but to confess it. That is an especially important part of living a blessed life, that we are able to see our sins and failings in life and confess them to God and each other. If you go through life, thinking that someone else is always at fault, you will be a miserable person to live with, but when you are able to see your faults and confess them, you will find that it will make all of your relationships better.

When you receive the words of God's Law, it is a blessing because those words teach us how to lead a blessed life and what sins need to be washed away and forgiven in our own lives.

II. But the greatest gift is the Gospel.

You have especially learned to know Jesus Christ as your Savior. It started with one of the first songs that you probably learned, "Jesus Loves Me this I know." As a little child, you might have been a little confused about who Jesus is, but you came to know that God loved you so much that He gave His only begotten Son for you. You came to understand how horrible it was to suffer on the cross, and that Jesus did it for you. He paid for your sins. There might have already been days when you felt really guilty for something you have done. You prayed for forgiveness, and it was a burden lifted off of your shoulder to know that you are forgiven. In Christ, God washed that sin away. There might have been times when you were afraid, and it was good to know that Christ was with you. In today's epistle lesson Peter writes, "*Cast all your cares on Him, for He cares for you.*" God cares for you. He will never let the righteous fall. Jesus also gives the gift of eternal life. In vs 3 Jesus says, "*And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*" The greatest gift in Christ is to know that this life is not all that there is. Christ has won eternal life for us where there will be no more crying or mourning or pain. We will live with Him eternally in His glory. At times people do wander from this good news, but for me as a pastor one of the greatest joys is when they return and rejoice in our Lord's grace again.

You have heard that Word that Jesus Christ is Your Savior. You have been baptized in His name, and I pray that you have received that word. There is no greater joy than to know that God loves you and Christ is your Savior. He has forgiven your sins. He will always be there for you, and He will gift you the gift of eternal life. To make you doubly sure, you now have a special privilege. You are invited to the altar of our Lord where our Savior gives you His body and blood as the assurance of the forgiveness of all of your sins. Make use of this sacrament often that you will be assured that Jesus is Your Savior.

You are very young now, and I hope that you both live to a ripe old age. One thing that often amazes me about our oldest members, especially those with things like Alshemiers is that they will often forget almost everything in life. They don't even recognize their children anymore or know their names, but the one thing that they never forget is what they learned about Jesus when they were young. They still remember the Bible verses, hymns, and prayers that they learned when they were your age. They received God's Word and it guided them well through their life. May that same word guide you and each of us, that we may know for certain that Jesus is our Savior and find peace and happiness in Him.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard, Benediction Lutheran Church,  
Milwaukee, WI, June 1, 2014***