

Sermon Ascension 2021

May 16, 2021

Luke 24:44-53

Confirmands, family, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and or Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Confirmands, thanks be to God! You made it through. You did your memory work and your sermon notes, and your papers. You listened to me talk for somewhere around seventy-five hours of class time. And now you're here. But as I say that, I'm also going to say something I've said before. Remember, this is not a graduation. This isn't like moving on from church, or Sunday School, or learning about the faith. Instead, continue to grow. Continue to plan for learning and studying the Bible. Do this in daily readings. Do this in hearing the preaching on Sundays. Know this teaching. And why? Think about what we said in the catechism for the third petition – don't count out which one that is, I'll tell you: "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." How is God's will done? God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of who? The devil, the world, and our sinful nature. And what do they not want us to do? To hallow God's Name—they do not want us to live according to that word of our Lord—or to let His kingdom come—they don't want for His Holy Spirit to bring faith. You are in a challenging spot because the devil, the world, and our sinful nature do not want you to continue in this faith you're confessing.

And this is even harder because it's not like the devil is going to appear before you in a red suit with horns and a pitchfork and try to convince you. No. He'll appear as an angel of light if he has to. And the world around us, our friends and neighbors, perhaps our teachers at school—and even our own sinful nature—these will all to pull us to other things away from our Lord. They'll all pull us from the faith and promises of our God. And think about how challenging this. It comes from outside of us. And you all know it. It comes from inside of us, from our own sinful nature.

So, where is our strength then? In Jesus. Confirmands, continue in the grace of Jesus. Continue where Jesus gives that grace to you. And where is that? You know it. It's where the cross of Jesus comes to you as you read that Word, as you hear it here in the readings, in the sermon, in the absolution. And thanks be to God, today, you will begin to receive it with His body and blood. Confirmands, these are your strength.

Think about it this way. You all play or participate in sports of some kind. Think about how you have to eat in order to perform at your best. You can't go perform in a

competition, whatever it is, without having eaten. This Word and Sacrament are your food so that you can go into the world strengthened for life in it. Continue in that, always.

Now, having said that, I'd like to talk to the parents—and I'm going to include our grandparents, godparents here. First of all, like I said last week, thank you for all the work you have done to bring the confirmands to this point. They all reflect the care you have shown them in teaching them the faith. Thank you and thanks be to God for that. Having said that, I want to continue to encourage you in that all the more. Look at what Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, “ **Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**” Now that passage literally speaks to fathers – and dad's this is especially our job, statistic after statistic speaks to how important fathers are in the development of children in the faith, and we'll be held accountable in a particular way be God for that—however, we can extrapolate for all those in authority. So, parents, grandparents, godparents, look at what that means. Teach these kids that this faith is absolutely the most important thing there is. Teach them that there is nothing that can compensate for losing eternity. And this job is becoming increasingly hard. We have all sorts of things that distract us from this work, things that draw out attention away from it. Things that are extremely important but not as much as the church, as the faith.

For example, I told the confirmands that when they're choosing colleges to look into churches near those colleges and pick based on where they will have a solid foundation for their faith. You know, we look at what schools are going to be perceived the best for jobs when we finish, but don't take into consideration what will be best for when they finish this life. Even within this life, we forget that Jesus says in Matthew 6: “ **But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**” I encourage you to keep that in mind too. It won't matter if our kids graduate from Yale if they lose their faith in the meantime. Also, continue to bring them to church, and make every effort to go even when other schedules conflict with them. By that I mean even every Sunday.

As I say that, is as though we will lose our salvation if we miss a Sunday here or a Sunday there? Let's be frank, most likely that won't. But the reality is that we are deluded and have a false sense of security about how capable we are in the battle against sin. We think of ourselves like highly trained athletes who can fend off the temptations of the evil one like Chuck Norris fights bad guys. We should think of ourselves like addicts. It's common that addicts will kick their habits and at a point think that the substance they've kicked is something that they can manage. So, they have one drink, or one dose of whatever. And at first, they might do that occasionally and it's fine, but then it's

common that they'll fall back fully into the throes of the addiction. We're all addicts to sin. We all always need the constant treatment against that that Jesus gives to us in His Word in His Sacraments. We all have need to be vigilant. You all are, and I encourage you in that, like I said. But I encourage you always to every increasing vigilance.

In fact, we have all of you here who aren't confirmands or parents, grandparents, godparents, and the like. Hopefully, as I've been talking you've been hearing all of this for yourselves too. Because that's the reality. All of this applies to all of us. We all need increasing vigilance in this.

But having said that, I also have to acknowledge that this isn't easy. The fight against the unholy trinity, as it's called, against the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, that fight is not easy. You all know that. It's taxing. It taxes us in that we become tempted ourselves, we become distracted by worldly pleasures and worries ourselves, we become despondent about the world ourselves. And that worry and the temptation and the guilt, those all weigh on us. No, it's not easy. In fact, if it were up only to us, you all know what would happen, right? If this were just up to us, we would fail. We would fail ten out of ten times. But thankfully, we know it's not just up to us. Thankfully, we know that this is in the hands of our gracious Lord Jesus.

And as we observe the ascension of our Lord Jesus today, it's quite fitting, because in it we have great comfort. How so? Well, look at what the ascension is. You know, we so often just think about this with regard to the fact that Jesus went up into heaven. But so what? Was ist das? What does that mean?

Well, it means that God approved of all that Jesus did and testified to the importance of Jesus' Word. That's important. However, it means a lot more. Listen to what Paul says about this in his letter to the Ephesians: **“what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”** So, what does all that mean? It means that when Jesus ascended into heaven, the Father gave Him power over all things.

You know power is a common topic in conversation in our day, everybody's worried about who has power and who has power over whom and all that. But Jesus is the One who ultimately has power. He sits at the right hand of the Father, which is that place for the right hand man, the trusted advisor, the one whom the king consults for decisions and counsel. That's where Jesus is—not in a literal sense of there being the Father in a chair,

and the Son sitting in this chair next to Him. No, it's a symbolic statement. But it tells us that this Jesus reigns, that He's in control over all things, that He is capable of working what's best. And to draw further comfort from this, look at who this Jesus is as He reigns.

You know, I love how we can see this in this passage from Luke. Here Jesus is and He's been raised, and Luke tells us that He's shown them in all these ways about who He is by miracles and life after the resurrection, and He takes this moment to explain His work to His disciples. He reminds them, **"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."** Then, Luke tells us that He **"opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'"** Take a second and think about that and what that says about Jesus. He worked all things to fit with what we call the Old Testament. Everything was worked so that it fulfilled the writing of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. All that had been said about what He would do and who He would be was fulfilled. He did it all. And to what end? So that He would suffer and on the third day be raised from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His Name.

In other words, all of that was worked for salvation. For your salvation. This Jesus who has all of this power and this authority doesn't have that so that He can be fat and happy like rulers and those who govern in our earthly kingdoms. No, He does all of this for you.

And look how He does it. Look how He has brought you to His waters of baptism. Look at how He has cared for your needs of body and soul, how He's brought that life giving blood from the cross to you. Look how He has done this so that you will be cleansed and made holy in Him. Look His great love for you.

As you hear that, then, do you think He'll leave you alone in the challenges of this world? Parents, grandparents, godparents, do you think He'll leave you alone in caring for these under your purview? Confirmands, do you think He'll leave you alone against the devil, the world, and your sinful nature? No! He hasn't and He won't. As is ascended and lives and reigns with the Father, He will never leave you nor forsake you. He will always be right where He promises to be in His Word and in His Sacraments. It might not always feel like those are doing much for you, but remember we always listen to what His Word tells us. Because this Jesus who loves us never lies. And that is a truth that we can all hold onto unto eternity. Amen.