

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
5327 W. Washington Blvd.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Seventh Sunday of Easter (Confirmation Sunday)
May 4, 2008
1 Peter 4:12-19;5:6-11

“Confirmed in Christ”
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

I have often observed how very fitting the assigned readings for a particular week are. The three year series gives us a great variety of texts to work from. Yet when I looked at the Epistle for this week it became strikingly clear that I could not have picked a more fitting reading for this confirmation Sunday. In fact the word jumped right out at me in v.10 of 1 Peter 5: “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you.” There it was, the word confirm. And what is even more remarkable is that it is only in the English Standard Version translation, the one which we have been using with our new hymnal, where that particular word is used. So having the text placed right before us, we pray that the Lord would use his word mightily as we consider the theme: “Confirmed in Christ!” [Even though we are not observing confirmation in this particular service, the words are still very appropriate for each of us.]

I. Suffering and a Powerful Adversary

The words of our text are part of St. Peter’s discussion of suffering. Now that might not seem like an appropriate place to begin this day, but it actually is. You [our] confirmands are all young and active. We may have a hard time thinking about suffering. But you know your lives and what you face. You know the temptations that come upon you. You should be able to relate to the words of the apostle about sharing in Christ’s sufferings, insulted for the name of Christ, suffering as a Christian.

Whoa! Wait a minute! You may be thinking what is it that I am getting myself into here? I can’t relate to those words at all. Well, maybe you can. Have you ever felt uncomfortable around some of your friends or acquaintances because you were sure that what they were doing was not right? Have you ever been called something bad or insulting because you would not go along? That is a form of suffering for Christ. It may be very subtle, but it happens, constantly, all the time.

The persecution and opposition to the Christian faith may be very violent. Peter calls it a fiery trial. And to many Christians in his time it was just that. But it can also be a fiery trial in our day as well. There are places in the world where still Christians give their lives for the sake of their faith. If you remember several weeks ago when Pastor Torgerson spoke, I was speaking to him about a man from the former East Germany with whom I had exchanged e-mails. He had told me that he was not religious or a member of any church. And Pastor Torgerson said that was very typical of people in the former East Germany. Over 75% do not

claim to have a church affiliation. And I would point out that persecution over the decades may have had a lot to do with that. The years of the Nazi rule during the second World War and then almost 40 years of Communist rule took their toll on the church. Sometimes the persecution was not violent, but it was very effective. And now almost 20 years after the fall of the communist state, that part of Germany is free, but it is a land needing to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is our prayer that none of you would ever face that kind of persecution.

Secondly, Peter would remind us who the real enemy is: "Be sober-minded, be watchful, because your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Now we do not have lions around here, or do we? Did you see the story recently about the cougar (mountain lion) that was shot in the city of Chicago. Tests have indicated that it came through Wisconsin from South Dakota. It made it all that way, quietly, stealthily, probably at night. And it was shot because no one wants a mountain lion in their neighborhood. We should be as concerned about the temptations and tests of the devil who wants to devour us. But as Peter says, "Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kind of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."

II. Confirmed

Now it is time to get to that word "Confirmed". Confirmation is a rite, that is a ceremony, of the church. It is not in itself commanded by the Lord in His word, but it is a good way for you to have been instructed and to make a public affirmation of your faith. Today is also the day when you will receive your first communion. What a blessing the sacrament of the Altar is for all of us. And that is probably the most important part of your confirmation.

But we must note something very important here. It is God who is doing the confirming. Listen carefully to what Peter is writing: "The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself, restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you." God confirms you in Christ. It is God's work. It is his plan. It is His word of promise and grace at work in you.

Because Easter was so early this, we are very close to the end of the Easter season. Thursday evening we celebrated the Ascension of our Lord. Many of you were here singing. We extinguished the Christ candle which burns from Easter Sunday until Ascension day. Jesus is no longer physically present with us, but he is assuredly with us always even to the end of the world. The Gospel lesson for this day, is also very fitting. It is the opening of the high priestly prayer of Jesus. There he reminds us: "This is eternal life, that they may know you the only God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." And then he prays. "All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one." Holy Father, keep them in your name. What more appropriate pray can there be for you [our confirmands]? What more

appropriate prayer for all of us. For our Lord Jesus is saying the same thing that St. Peter has in our text. We are confirmed in Christ by the God of all grace. And he will restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

Remain in his word. Be faithful. Serve our Lord with joy. I often end sermons with hymn verses. As I was talking with my mother yesterday, I showed her the verse I intended to close with today. She told me that it was her confirmation hymn from 74 years ago and that she still uses it almost every day as her prayer. There is a good example of faithfulness in action.

Let me be thine forever,
My faithful God and Lord,
Let me forsake Thee never,
Nor wander from Thy Word.
Lord, do not let me waver,
But give me steadfastness.
And for such grace forever,
Thy holy name I'll bless.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)