

Revelation 2:10 (John 12:12-19)

The problem with always having confirmation on Palm Sunday is that one year confirmation happens in late April, the next year it takes place in mid-March...whether the confirmands are ready or not. But some churches hold fast to this tradition. Their confirmands, along with their parents, their grandparents, and their great-grandparents--it's a Palm Sunday confirmation for all of them. Yet, the tradition goes back farther than three or four generations. It goes back farther even than the Lutheran Church has been around. It goes back to the original Palm Sunday. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day, throngs of people were following Him, cheering Him with their "Hosannas!" Were not they the very first Palm Sunday confirmation class? They bowed the knee to Jesus. They expressed their desire to follow Him. But here is why we know for sure that all those people were confirmands--because in a very short time most all of them fell away from the Lord.

There was one, however, who was faithful. Of all those people, one did keep his solemn vow. Only one, but because that one was Jesus; because He was faithful unto death, He sets the pattern for us. If you have kneeled before God's altar to make your confirmation pledge, or if you are about to kneel now, or sometime in the future, whether on a Palm Sunday or not...consider Jesus and what He did for you. He kept His promise for your sake. And that enables you to keep your promise to Him. Nothing else does. Nothing else works.

I'm glad that Confirmation Day falls on Palm Sunday this year. It's very fitting, as we will see. And having one confirmand allows me the opportunity to focus the message today largely on his confirmation verse. Revelation 2:10 "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

These words are not for everyone. Jesus addressed them only to His bride...the church. When a husband and wife kneel before God's altar, that husband should not expect every woman he knows, from that day on, to be faithful to him...just his wife. Jesus does not expect the unbelieving world to be faithful to Him. They do not even know who He is. They do not know what His cross means for them. They do not know His sacrificial love. But you do...because you are His church. Not every woman, just the bride, is to be faithful to her husband. And because you are that bride, Jesus says to you, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Now when a husband and wife make the pledge to be faithful to each other, are they secretly groaning within themselves, perhaps thinking, "Rats! This is sure going to be a boring marriage. I really had not intended on being faithful to just my spouse." I hardly think so. It's a privilege, an honor to be called to be faithful. And their love for each other unites them in their faithfulness.

Tanner, you have learned over your time of instruction that living as a Christian is not going to be a boring, monotonous life. Being faithful to Jesus is both a privilege and an honor. It's challenging but also rewarding. It does not make you less of a man to live as a follower of Jesus. Just the opposite. As a husband and wife find completeness in each other, so we are complete, as a man or a woman, only as we find our place in Christ.

You do not have to give up life to be a Christian. Instead, you are called to a higher life with your Lord. A new bride and groom no longer worry about trying to mingle in with the single's crowd. They do not try to impress the opposite sex any longer. They have each other and are fulfilled in each other. They have advanced beyond their former way of life. Now it is both challenging, but also rewarding, for them to love and serve the other. And that is your calling in life, Tanner, as a

Christian. Your concern is not what the unbelieving world is so concerned with. You have a higher purpose, a noble calling...to live a life of service to the God who loved you and gave Himself for you.

Being faithful to Jesus does not mean that you must become a wimp in life. It does not mean that you must give up television and the movies. It does not mean that you put on the robes of a monk and allow yourself no fun in life. Husbands and wives do not stop having fun when they get married. But now their fun, their entire life, revolves no longer just around themselves, but around their marriage with their spouse. Living as a Christian--being faithful to Christ means living like He is your Divine Spouse. Yet, not an angry, dominant spouse, but one who loves you completely.

Being faithful to Jesus means you will strive to keep His rules, His Commandments. And they are not burdensome...unless we do not really love Him. A husband's love for his wife will motivate him to want to please her, just as her love for him will do the same. You will strive to be faithful to Christ, Tanner, because you love Him. It's those who don't love Him who stop being faithful. They love themselves more than they love Jesus, so they stop striving to keep His rules and live by their own.

And it all boils down to one thing...it's what Jesus did for you. None of us could be faithful to Him unless He first was faithful for us. He did not jump off that donkey and run up into the hills. He stayed on the donkey and rode into the city where He would die. Jesus did not quit when they began pulling out His beard, or when they whipped His back with bits of metal. He stuck it out to the end. He bore the burden of your sin and mine. Jesus was not faithful only until they drove the nails through His flesh, or until they stood around Him laughing and mocking, or until His Father in Heaven punished Him with hell by turning His face away from Him in anger. Jesus was faithful unto death for your sake to win your redemption, to secure your place with Him in heaven.

And so how long will you be faithful to Him? Until friends at school poke fun because you are a Christian? Until you start to get busy with life, working and so forth? Until you hear something said in church that offends you? Tanner, Jesus is not asking you to do something that He has not already done for you. And that's why you will be faithful. Not because you dig down deep to find the strength. Not because you make a decision to be faithful. Your faithfulness is all wrapped up in Jesus' faithfulness to you. And so as you become all wrapped up in hearing Jesus' words and in receiving His Holy Sacrament, His faithfulness will cause you to be and remain faithful.

And no matter what, you will always have a place with Him. If you stray, if you fall away, do not think that He has stopped loving you. Do not think that He could never take you back. All of us have fallen. Every day we fall into sin. We are always straying from Christ. But you, Tanner, and each and every one of you has a Divine Spouse who is forgiving. He died for you. God forgives you no matter how far you have strayed, no matter what sin lives in your heart and life. There is room for all of you at the foot of His cross. No sin of yours is too great for His blood to cleanse. Believe it. As Jesus' church has always proclaimed, "Repent and believe(the good news.)"

Tanner, in a way it's too bad that you have no confirmation classmates. Some of you had four, seven, a dozen or more in your confirmation class. And these classmates can do something for each other...they can encourage each other to be faithful to Jesus. I have your confirmation certificate here in my hands, and there is a page in it which reads, "The Members of My Class," and spaces for thirty-four classmates to sign their names. Well, since a classmate is one who learns together and becomes an encourager, Tanner, I learned from the Word of God even as I was teaching you. And it is my intention to keep encouraging you to remain faithful. And so, in a sense, I am your classmate. I'm

going to sign my name here in your certificate...not as Pastor Bell in this case, but Randall Bell here on the line of your fellow class members.

What about you, dear members of Christ Lutheran Church? I challenge you to be fellow encouragers of Tanner, and of each other, and of me. Are you not also learning God's Word with him? Will you help him to be faithful to Christ? Today as you shake his hand after church, won't you sign your name, too, and then follow through? And today's confirmation class of one will be the largest class this church has ever had. Be faithful, Tanner. Be faithful each and every one of you. Jesus was, and is, faithful to you. Amen.