

"Overcoming the World"

John 16:23-33

May 5, 2013

Confirmation Day (6th Sunday of Easter)

Tommy, Mollie, and Katherine, you probably think that things just got easier for you. You've made it through two years of confirmation class. You completed the homework. You memorized the memory work. You've passed the tests. Now, it's just some responses you have to say in the Rite of Confirmation and you are home free! It's time for the reception and gifts after church. Then it will be the confirmation dinner and gifts after that. (And, oh, did I mention there are gifts?) Yes, it certainly appears that things are going to get easier. I hate to be the one to burst your bubble, but that's not true.

We see that happen in our Gospel reading for today. The 12 disciples of Jesus had been in a "confirmation class" with him for about three years. Now, on the night before He died, Jesus was having a bit of a "final exam" with them. They think they have everything figured out and things are just going to get better. After Jesus' little lecture, they say to Him, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God." I'm sure those disciples were feeling as proud of themselves as you are feeling about yourselves today.

Then Jesus' bursts their bubbles. Knowing what was about to take place, Jesus says, "Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone." The disciples may have thought they knew Jesus' teaching and believed it, but when it came to applying it in their lives, they failed. Judas sold out His Master for thirty pieces of silver. Peter denied even knowing Jesus. All of the other disciples deserted Jesus and ran away in fear.

As a result, these careless confirmands experienced great guilt. Peter broke down and wept because of guilt. They experienced lack of faith. Judas hung himself because of his lack of faith in the mercy and goodness of God. All experienced fear over the real possibility that they might die.

Although we can be critical of these disciples, because of sin and its influence, nothing has changed. As much as you think you have faith figured out, Jesus knows how you will fail Him after this day. And, not just to pick on you, Jesus knows how your parents and grandparents will fail Him. He knows how every member of this church and every visitor here today will fail Him. He knows how even I, your pastor, will fail Him.

Some will sell Jesus out, preferring the trinkets this world has to offer to the gifts God promises us in Jesus. It may be money, like Judas, or it could be fame, popularity, good grades, a prestigious university, a high paying job, or any of a hundred things that we would rather have than faithfully following Jesus Christ.

Some will deny Jesus. I doubt many here would be as blatant as Peter and literally say, "I don't know the man." No, some will simply live as if they don't know Jesus, don't believe in Jesus, and don't follow Jesus. This will be shown in our priorities and our behavior.

Some will desert Jesus and run away in fear. When the cause of Christ comes into conflict with the culture of this world, it is easier to compromise our faith, modify our behavior, and accommodate the culture than faithfully confessing the faith and boldly living the faith. Fear can make us do those things.

As a result, we may experience guilt – at least, at the beginning. But, after denying Christ becomes a habit, we can create calluses on our consciences that dull the guilt.

Some will leave the faith. Perhaps it won't be as dramatic and final as Judas did. People leave the faith slowly and gradually: missing worship here or there, toning down on the Bible Study and memorization when it is no longer required, or shoving Bible reading and

personal devotions out of our schedule because we are too busy with other things. Pretty soon confirmands who proudly stood here before as you stand here today are no longer with us.

Many will experience fear. Things are getting worse in the world: acts of terrorism appearing again and again; mass shootings happening so often that they are no longer uncommon; morality tanking it; and, of course, the greatest source of fear that will affect everyone: death. Fear will affect most everyone somehow and somewhere.

You would think that Jesus would have bawled out His 12 confirmands that night, but he doesn't. Instead, Jesus comforts them and encourages them. Jesus says, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace." Jesus wasn't talking about a peaceful feeling, nor was He predicting political or military peace. He was talking about peace with God.

Denial, betrayal, desertion, and any other sin causes conflict with God and separation from Him for all eternity if nothing is changed. Jesus knew, as He spoke, what He had come to do in the coming hours and days. He would voluntarily offer up His life as the sacrifice for the sin of all people. His death would end humanity's conflict with God through the forgiveness of sin. Jesus would then come back from death to show that the gap between humanity and God had been bridged and there was no longer any separation.

Jesus was saying to them that when they were connected to Him and under His influence and control then their relationship with God had been restored and they were at peace – true peace. This message was received differently by different people. Judas refused the offer of peace and hung himself. Peter was restored by Christ through this good news and was at peace. All of the other disciples were likewise restored and brought to peace with God.

Jesus speaks these comforting words to you on your confirmation day and to all of us every day that we assemble here. You studied the 10 Commandments and have seen how

you sin against these commandments in thought, word, and deed, by the bad things you have done and the good things you have failed to do.

You studied the Creed. You learned of the love of God the Father who not only created your life, provided for your life, and protected your life, but also sent His Son to redeem your life from death and hell.

You learned of the redemption by God the Son, Jesus Christ, who paid to bring you back from Satan's control, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death that you may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom.

You learned of the work of the Holy Spirit who brought you into union with Jesus in your baptism, forgiving your sins and giving you the gift of faith. You were baptized into Christ. You are not separated from Him, but in union with him through faith. You are acceptable to Him through the forgiveness of your sins. You are at peace with God. This peace is not a blissful feeling. It is a right relationship with Him.

Does that mean that everything in your Christian life is a piece of cake from now on? As I said at the beginning, this is not true. Not only do things not get easier. They get a lot harder.

The disciples found this out for themselves. After their faith was confirmed on Easter Sunday with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, they probably thought they were home free. Everything would go smoothly now as they proclaimed Christ and lived out their faith. But they were rejected by their fellow countrymen. They were persecuted by Jews and Gentiles alike. And, every one of them (except for John) would be killed for confessing their faith in Christ and living faithfully according to that confession.

How did they hold up? How did they resist the temptation to compromise their faith? How did they refuse to change their behavior so that it might conform to the culture? They remembered Jesus' words, "In me, you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

The world that sought to overcome them, defeat them, and destroy them had been overcome by Jesus. He gained the victory over sin, death, and the devil on the cross. He confirmed that victory by the empty tomb. As long as the disciples were "in Jesus", they shared His victory and were assured of eternal life. So they spent their lives being where

Jesus promised to be. The book of Acts describes it this way: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42) In other words, they devoted themselves to the Word of God, fellowshiping with other Christians, the Lord’s Supper, and worship.

If you haven’t already noticed, it’s difficult being a Christian these days. If you seek to stick to the confession you will make today and live according to the vows you make today, you will face opposition. Many will reject you for what you believe, persecute you for what you do, and, perhaps, even cause you harm for it. (The same goes for your parents, grandparents, and everyone else here.)

So, I encourage you (and your siblings, parents, family, and friends) with Jesus’ words, “In me, you have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” Remain in Him and share His victory. Be where He has promised to be: in the waters of your baptism; in the Word of God, read and preached here; and in His very body and blood given to you in His Supper. While you may lose in the short term, you will share the eternal victory with Him in heaven.

Today, you will make some important vows. Many people think this is the center of Confirmation Day: your promises to God. It’s not. Confirmation Day is all about God’s promises to you. He has chosen you to be His child in Holy Baptism. He declared you to be holy because Jesus lived the holy life in your place. He has pronounced you forgiven for all your sins because Jesus died on the cross for you. He has delivered that forgiveness to you in His Holy Word. He nourishes and strengthens your life with Him through Holy Communion. He has guaranteed an eternal life of joy and peace because Jesus came out of the tomb alive. Jesus Christ has literally overcome the world for you! Stay with Him and you will, too. Amen.