

"Having Arrived"

John 14:6

June 17, 2012

3rd Sunday After Pentecost (Confirmation Sunday)

Well, Mr. Fletcher – after all the instruction, all the reading, all the homework, all the memory work (especially the memory work), all the quizzes and all the tests, it is time for your confirmation day. You probably think you've really arrived because of the special plans we've made at church, the special plans your family has made at home, and all the people here to celebrate with you. You're truly in a class by yourself! You're finished! You've graduated! You're done!

If you think that way, you wouldn't be the first one to do so. You probably wouldn't be the only one thinking that way in this church today, either about you or about themselves. People tend to think about confirmation as a final destination to be arrived at. Every year, pastors look around, especially on confirmation day, to see how many of the previous confirmands are still in church. Sadly, the number of students not present (as well as their parents) is high, often because of this. If confirmation is a destination, many think there is no need to continue going after you've been confirmed.

But let's see what your confirmation verse (which is our sermon text) says about this. Does Jesus say to His disciples, "I am the destination,"? No. Jesus says, "I am the way." Literally, the word here means "road." Imagine if you went over to the west side of town, jumped on Highway 15 S, and declared, "Well, I've made it to Helena!" That wouldn't be true and it would be silly for you to say. All you've done is get on the road *to* your destination.

Eric, you and everyone else here, were born apart from God. You not only were not on the road to God, but you were in the ditch of sin. You were not going to get to God on your own. You and everyone here were doomed to a destination of death and destruction. Yet God had mercy. God sent Jesus to rescue us. By His death on the cross, Jesus did not merely open a clear way to God,

but Jesus became that road – that way - Himself. And that’s why He says, “I am the way.” He is the way to God.

Do you remember what you were doing on July 19, 1998? Probably not. But that was a day even more important than today. On that day, you were baptized. Through Holy Baptism, God washed away all of your sins for the sake of the shed blood of Jesus and He put you on the road – the Way, Jesus Christ. By God’s grace, you joined many others here who have been on that road since their baptisms. By faith, you’ve been traveling that road for almost 14 years. Through the Word of God taught by your parents, your Sunday School teachers, and, finally, me and preached by pastors who have occupied this pulpit, you’ve been kept safe and sound on the road to God.

If you’ve been on a highway, you’ve probably noticed mile markers that have numbers on them. These signs show how far you’ve gone on your journey and how far you have to go. I doubt that you ever pull over in your car to celebrate having arrived at Mile Marker #183. Confirmation Day is probably more of a big deal than it should be. It is, essentially, a mile marker on the way to God. We look back on how far you’ve come since that day when the pastor poured water over you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You received forgiveness and faith that day. Your sponsors spoke that faith for you because you couldn’t do it. Today, having been catechized in the Christian faith, you confess that faith for yourself. It’s an important mile marker in your journey. We are happy and celebrate because of that. But this mile marker tells us that you still have a long way to go on this road.

It’s not going to be easy. Many will try to pull you off the way – to lead you on a detour from the road to God. Some of these detours are different beliefs than the ones you’ve learned from Holy Scripture; different priorities than the ones you’ve learned from the first three Commandments; different moralities than you’ve learned from the last seven Commandments. People will claim that these detours will eventually lead to God, but without being so strict, exclusive or fanatical. But if these beliefs, priorities, or moralities are apart from or contrary to Christ, they are nothing but lies and

detours to death and destruction in hell. For Jesus says, later in your confirmation verse, “No one comes to the Father except through me.”

While many have been distracted and detoured from the Way, Jesus Christ, it doesn't have to be. Jesus gives you the tools to stay firmly on the road and on the way to God. Jesus says, “I am the Truth.” In the midst of all the lies this world has to throw against you, you have the Truth – Jesus Christ. On the night before Jesus died, He prayed for His disciples then and His disciples now when He prayed to His Heavenly Father, “Sanctify (make holy) them by the truth; your word is truth.” Is there a contradiction there? Isn't Jesus the truth? He is and the Word of God brings Jesus to us. In His Word, we have His truth. Whenever you stray from the way through sin, the Word of God – the Law - tells you the truth about your sin and leads you to repentance. The Word of God – the Gospel - also brings forgiveness of sin to you and puts you back on the way to God.

So, Eric, if you or anyone else here wants to avoid being led astray from the way to God, then don't let confirmation be the end of your study of the Word of God, but the beginning of an intensive study of the Word of God which will last for the rest of your life. With the Word of God by your side, you will be kept safe from the lies and errors which Satan sends to get you off the way to God and on the way to him. You'll continue safely on the Way, Jesus Christ.

Now, some will say (especially those who have gone off the road to God, seeking the beliefs, priorities, and moralities of this world) that this isn't much of a life when you are hearing the Word of God, studying the Word of God, and following the Word of God. Such a life will be called dull and deprived of the good things of life. People will tell you there are more important things and more enjoyable things in life than this “faith thing.” It will be tempting to listen to such voices. Many have. There's a lot of appealing ideas, appealing priorities, appealing stuff out there.

But do you know the one thing that everyone forgets? All of that stuff out there, as appealing, exciting, and enjoyable as it is, will one day be gone. All of those tempting you with it will be dead. Not much of a life in the long run, is it? The life this world has to offer always ends in death.

But Jesus says, "I am the Life." He can say that He because He lived life here on this earth as you have, facing all the temptations you have faced, yet overcoming them all and living the perfect life God expects from you.. But, more importantly, He died and overcame death by rising from death to unending life again. We don't honor a dead hero. We don't worship a Savior who is long gone. We have a living Lord who gives you life – true life – as God intended it to be. He gave you life in Holy Baptism, that is, His perfect life so that you can stand before God on the Last Day. And when you die, He gives you life after death that never ends in a perfect existence without the problems and the suffering we experience now.

Meanwhile, He nourishes you in that life with His own Body and Blood, given in bread and wine, for you to eat and drink. That's real life. That's real nourishment for that real life. That's life that lasts past pain and disappointment, despite suffering and rejection, and through death and the grave. That's the life that God has given you and wants always to have.

We rejoice and celebrate here today, not in what Eric or anyone else here has done. We are celebrating and rejoicing in what God has done, is doing, and will do in, through, and for Eric and us to bring us past death to life eternal. He has put us on the way – Jesus Christ who is the Way. He keeps us on the way through Jesus Christ who is the Truth. He will bring us into the fullness of life through Jesus Christ who is the Life. And then – and only then – will you have arrived. Amen.