

Confirmation Sunday – June 14, 2015

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

(Ephesians 1:15-23 NIV)

... ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17) I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18) I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19) and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20) which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21) far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22) And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23) which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Dear friends;

It was back in September of 2013 that the members of this year's confirmation class began their confirmation instructions with a lesson which asked: What is confirmation? I explained that confirmation involved a process of strengthening. Through their study of the Word they would be strengthened in the Christian faith and in Christian living. At the close of that class we spoke briefly about the significance of the confirmation ceremony. During the rite of confirmation the members of this year's class will confess the Christian faith and promise to remain faithful to him.

Today I want to remind the confirmands and their parents that they are not celebrating an ending but a continuing of the confirmation process. The promise to remain faithful to Christ and his teachings is a promise to continue to grow in the Christian Faith and the Christian life.

The words of our text for today were first addressed to a group of Christians whom Paul had the privilege of teaching for over two years. Some time has passed and word has come to him that they were still fighting the good fight of faith. He rejoiced when he heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their service to their fellow Christians. Now he wanted to encourage them to continue to grow in the Christian Faith and life. He wanted them to receive blessings from above and so he offered his prayers for them to the glorious God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him in the heavenly realms at his ascension into heaven.

The festival of Ascension was this just about a month ago. Jesus' Ascension is important because it assures us blessings from above – blessings which we desire for ourselves as Christians but also blessings which we desire for the young students who will promise today to grow in their Christian faith and life.

Blessings from Above

1. Our Ascended Lord helps believers grow in faith
2. Our Ascended Lord uses his power on behalf of his church

Our text includes a beautiful confirmation prayer. **I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.**

Our Ascended Lord helps believers grow in faith

I hope that all of you will join me in asking for that blessing for the members of our confirmation class this year. It is a blessing of God the Holy Spirit that we have a knowledge and understanding of God. The words of our text encourage us not to be satisfied with just a basic understanding of God. Ask the Lord to bless you so that you can know him better. “The Spirit of revelation” has provided us with the Holy Scriptures for this very purpose – to give us a better understanding of God and his wonderful blessings.

It is my prayer for each of you that the Spirit would enable you to hunger and thirst for more and more knowledge so that you may be blessed with the divine wisdom that comes from studying the Scripture – a wisdom that knows, understands and follows the Word and will of God for your life.

Before the fall into sin, Adam and Eve had an intimate knowledge of God. They walked and talked with him. They knew him just as we know our best friends – probably even better. That changed when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. You and I were born sinful – without that knowledge of God. In fact, **the mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.** Romans 8:7 NIV)

The more time we spend together with someone the better we get to know them. Often the more time we spend with someone the closer we become to them. As we gain wisdom through the hearing and studying of God's Word we will get to know our Savior better and better. We will be drawn closer to him and we will have a better understanding of the many blessings that are ours because of our relationship with him. The more we learn of his love, the more we will desire to live in love for him and for others. What a wonderful prayer this is for the young ladies who will promise to remain faithful to the Lord and to live in keeping with his will.

There is another confirmation prayer in our text. **I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.**

This is a prayer for enlightenment or understanding. It is a prayer that the believers would be enabled to see for themselves the hope which is theirs in Christ Jesus. Those who have been called to faith in Jesus have been called to a life of hope. The Christian hope is different than the hope of many in this world because God himself will enable our hope to become reality. God has called us to enjoy eternal life with him in heaven. We have the sure hope of life in heaven guaranteed to us by the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the inheritance that we will enjoy as saints – people who are holy in God's sight through faith in Christ Jesus.

But even now the hope which we have fills our lives with blessings. We have the confidence that together with the Lord Jesus our heavenly Father will provide us with all that we need for this life until he takes us to live with him in heaven.

There is not a single one of us who knows for sure what is going to happen to us in this lifetime. But we can count on the fact that we will face temptations to forget what we have learned from the Word and to follow a path through life which is in conflict with God's will. But there's something else we can count on. We can count on the Lord's power to enable us to remain faithful to him and his will.

Paul's confirmation prayer includes the prayer that believers will see for themselves the great power of God that believers have available to them. Every believer has already experienced the power of God in their lives. It is the power of God that has open our eyes to see our Savior. It is the power of God that lead us to repent of our sins and to trust in Jesus for forgiveness. It is the power of God that has filled our hearts with the hope of eternal life.

My dear friends, God wants to continue to exert his power in your lives. God unleashes his power into the lives of believers in many ways. He does it when he strengthens our faith through the Means of Grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. He does it when we grow in our understanding of his will through the study of his Word. He does it when he helps us to do his will, difficult as that may be. He does it when he strengthens us in time of temptation. He does it when he gives us the strength to remain faithful to him when there is great pressure to question his Word of truth. He does it when he gives us the boldness and confidence to tell others about Jesus. He does it when he gives us the strength to get through the difficult times of our lives. He does it when he helps us to bear crushing physical and emotional burdens.

This is the same power that the God uses to bless his church from above. When God calls us to faith he adds us to the family of believers – to his church.

Our Ascended Lord uses his power on behalf of his church

Our text directs our attention to the greatness of God's power by reminding us of how he used that power to exalt Jesus Christ. **That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20) which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21) far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.**

Before we can fully appreciate the power of God we need to understand the love of God. **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.** 1 John 4:10 NIV) In his great love for us God the Son followed his Father's plan to rescue us from our sin by setting aside his divine power and becoming one of us so that he could live a perfect life for us and then die the death that we deserved for our sin.

Christ Jesus: 6) Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7) rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8) And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death-- even death on a cross! 9) Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11) and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11 NIV)

After Jesus laid down his life for sinners he was raised from the dead through the power of God and he was given his proper place as true God in the realms of heaven. There he uses his power and his authority to bring blessings to his church and its members as Romans 8:33-39 assures us. **Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34) Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36) As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38) For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39) neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** NIV)

These are blessings from above that we enjoy as believers. The ascended Savior also blesses his church. **God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.**

Although Jesus is exalted with supreme honor, power and authority he doesn't use it in a self-serving manner. Just as he humbled himself for the benefit of others so he lovingly uses his power and dominion for those whom he has rescued. He protects believers from their enemies. He adds members to his church by causing the Gospel to be shared throughout the world and by sending the Holy Spirit to bring souls to faith through the Gospel. He promises to be with his church and to bless it until the end.

Is it any wonder then that the Scriptures encourage believers to continue to gather together around in the Lord's name to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? As we encourage each other and build each other up with the Word of God until the day of the Lord's return, we have the Lord's promise that he will bless our efforts to his glory.

Today the members of our confirmation class (Sydney & Jordan) will not only confess their Christian faith, they will promise to practice that faith as active members of this Christian congregation. They will promise to remain faithful to the Lord's Church even if it means being willing to die for their faith. Because they understand how impossible it would be for anyone to keep these promises with their own abilities as strength; they will make these promises trusting in the Lord to equip them for this task with his power. Relying on him, they will not be disappointed because in our text they have been assured of:

Blessings from Above

1. Our Ascended Lord helps believers grow in faith
2. Our Ascended Lord uses his power on behalf of his church

Amen.

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. Amen. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 NIV)