

Pentecost/Confirmation
June 8, 2003
John 14:25-27

The Holy Spirit Confirms Us

1. By teaching and reminding us
2. So that we enjoy peace

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

NIV John 14:25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today is Confirmation Day, the culmination of two years of instruction in God's Word through the use of the Bible and the *Small Catechism*. The idea behind the word "confirm" is that of making someone stronger. It's really not that this ceremony today makes you stronger Christians; it's the Spirit of God at work through the Word and Sacraments that does that. It's because the Holy Spirit has been teaching and reminding you of the words of your Savior that we can gather this morning to celebrate your confirmation and invite you to begin receiving Holy Communion.

Today is also the Festival of Pentecost. Along with Christmas and Easter, Pentecost is one of the three main festivals of the Christian church year. On Pentecost we celebrate the saving work of the Holy Spirit and his faith-sustaining presence among us through the Word and Sacraments.

It's fitting to have Confirmation on the Festival of Pentecost because there's a close connection between Confirmation and Pentecost. In reality it's really not your pastors or your teachers or even your parents who have strengthened your faith. It's the Holy Spirit who has done that. So this morning on this day of Confirmation/day of Pentecost we confess: **The Holy Spirit Confirms Us**. We see 1] that the Holy Spirit confirms us by teaching and reminding us of what Jesus said. We'll see 2] that when the Holy Spirit has done his confirming work, we enjoy peace.

1. By teaching and reminding us

At the beginning of this section Jesus says to his disciples, "*All this I have spoken while still with you.*" If you think you hear a hint of a farewell in these words, you're right. It's the eve of Jesus' crucifixion. He was going away: to the cross, to the grave, and, by his resurrection and ascension, to the majesty of the

Father's side in heaven. Because he would in a short time be visibly removed from his disciples, Jesus spent much of that evening repeating and emphasizing what he had taught his disciples over the course of the past three years. St. John records this in great detail: John 14 is one of five successive chapters of the words of Jesus.

To say that the disciples were an anxious group that evening would be putting it mildly. Talk of Jesus' dying and leaving left them with doubts and sadness. They also felt under-qualified for the work of transmitting the words of Jesus to other people. They voiced their doubts. Peter asked, "**Lord, where are you going?**" A little later, Thomas said, "**Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?**" And the other disciple named Judas (not Iscariot) suggested that maybe Jesus should show himself to the world rather than sending his disciples to do it for him. These disciples needed *confirming*. Their weakness of faith was plain to see.

Are you members of the confirmation class anxious? I suppose you feel some anxiety about getting up and speaking in front of a church full of people, but I'm not talking about that. I mean, as you think about what your Savior calls you to do as a Christian, are you anxious? Your call to ongoing discipleship with Jesus is summarized in the rite of confirmation. Jesus calls you to be faithful to him: faithful in hearing his Word, faithful in receiving Holy Communion, faithful in confessing his name before the world—faithful even to the point of dying rather than disowning him. As you think about making such solemn vows, it would be understandable to feel a bit anxious. And if that's how you feel, you have something in common with Jesus disciples on that night before he was arrested and crucified.

But Jesus didn't leave his disciples in that doubt and sadness. He gave them a faith-bolstering, confidence-producing promise. He said, "*But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*" There is one name to put away anxiety: Jesus. And the Holy Spirit was coming from God the Father to confirm these disciples by teaching them all things and reminding them of what Jesus had said. That means that by the Spirit's power they would not only be able to recall what Jesus had taught them, but they'd also understand it better than before. Take a look at our second lesson this morning and you see that Jesus kept his promise. The Holy Spirit, the Counselor, did come. He equipped the disciples to speak the good news about Jesus fearlessly. Later he reminded them of what Jesus had taught so that they could write these things down in the collection of Spirit-inspired writings that we call the New Testament.

The Holy Spirit is still doing his faith-strengthening, confidence-producing work. He will do that work in you as you continue to hear God's Word, study your Bible, and come to the Lord's Supper. Like the disciples, you might confess that there's a good share of Jesus' teachings that you aren't familiar with, things that you

don't completely understand. (Who of us doesn't have to say that?) But as the Spirit leads you to become a lifelong student of the Word and as you return to your baptism through daily contrition and repentance and join your fellow believers here at God's Table, the Spirit will build you up in your faith, making you strong, firm, and steadfast.

I think the real danger would be if you thought you didn't need any more strengthening. This year is the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of the highest mountain on earth, Mt. Everest. It was a New Zealander named Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, who made that first ascent. Since then, many others have reached the summit of Mt. Everest, but many others have died trying. Besides the treacherously icy slopes and the fierce storms that the climbers encounter, one of the greatest dangers is the shortage of oxygen one experiences at such great heights. It's a condition called hypoxia. The insidious thing about hypoxia is that it fools you into thinking that there's nothing wrong. The shortage of oxygen can cause a climber to delay making important decisions or to make foolish decisions, but due to the hypoxia's effect on his brain, the climber thinks everything is alright. Though most of the climbers nowadays carry bottled oxygen with them, hypoxia can cause them to think they don't need to use it. My encouragement to you this morning is to beware of the spiritual version of hypoxia. It's the erroneous notion that we reach a stage in our lives where we don't any longer need the spiritual strengthening that comes from hearing God's Word and partaking of Holy Communion. We all need this strengthening. Make your Bible a well-worn book. Keep your catechism where you can use it. And rejoice in your opportunities to gather with fellow Christians here as the Spirit strengthens us through the words of Jesus.

Right here in John's Gospel we have a beautiful example of the Holy Spirit's work of reminding us of what Jesus said. How do you suppose the apostle John could accurately recall 21 chapters of the words of Jesus? It was possible only because the Holy Spirit inspired him, breathed into him the very words he wrote down. John was led to recall what Jesus said so that we can be strengthened by reading these words centuries later. Now you can hear your Savior assuring you, **"Whoever comes to me, I will never drive away."** (6:37) And he also says to his anxious disciples, **"And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but will raise them up at the last day, for my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."** (6:39) These are the words that strengthen and confirm us.

And when we've been strengthened and confirmed by the Holy Spirit, we have peace.

2. So that we enjoy peace

In the second part of this section, Jesus goes on to say, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be*

troubled and do not be afraid.” Do you have something at your house that was inherited? A piece of furniture, perhaps, or a piece of jewelry or some china? Maybe you’ve heard someone say, “My grandmother left this to me.” Sometimes people inherit great wealth by way of inheritance.

Did you know that you’re mentioned in Jesus’ will? It says so right here: “*Peace I leave with you.*” Before he ascended to heaven, Jesus bequeathed to you and to all his disciples peace. I hope you’re not thinking, “Some inheritance that is: Peace!” Do teenagers want peace? Don’t they want excitement, adventure, and action? Peace? Peace can almost sound boring.

But I don’t think you’re any different from the rest of us. If you think of peace as the absence of fear and worry, you want that, don’t you? Changes, new things, challenges, and problems can all produce fear and worry in us. In many ways, the teenage years can be the most turbulent years of a person’s whole life. You’re going through great changes and facing great changes. But here stands your Savior, Jesus, saying, “Peace I leave with you.”

And the wonderful thing about the peace that Jesus gives is that it’s not like the peace that the world knows. For starters, this peace comes from knowing that Jesus reconciled us to God by presenting his own sinless life as a peace-offering on the cross. By that supreme act of self-sacrifice, we can live each day knowing that we are surrounded by God’s grace. Other kinds of peace can evaporate as quickly as drops of water on a hot sidewalk. But this peace from Jesus stays: it stays with you at school, stays with you at home, stays with you wherever you go—all through faith in Jesus and through the Spirit’s continued work in your hearts. Bottom line this is the peace of knowing that when this life is over and we are summoned before God’s throne to give account of our lives, we can answer confidently. For Jesus’ sake and by the Holy Spirit’s work, we know that we have a place in heaven prepared for us.

So in a few minutes when you make your confirmation vows, do it joyfully and confidently. You can—because through the Word the Holy Spirit has confirmed you and given you peace. And through the Word and Sacraments he promises to keep on confirming you. Amen.