

I.N.I.

Trinity/Confirmation
May 26, 2013
Heb. 12:1-2

In Christ Jesus, who is the Author and Finisher of our Faith, Dear Fellow Redeemed, and especially you James,

Today is a very special day for several reasons. This morning is Trinity Sunday. The day in which we raise our hearts and voices in praise to our Triune God for all that He has done for us. Praise to God the Father for creating us and planning our salvation.

Praise to God the Son for redeeming us by living a perfect life, dying on the cross as our Substitute and rising again.

Praise to God the Holy Spirit for bringing the Gospel to us and creating faith in our hearts through the power of His Word.

Today is also a very special day for you James, because this morning you will be making the most important promise you will ever make. A person makes many promises and commitments in his life and all of them are important. But you will never make one as important as this one. In fact you have spent years of study and preparation in order to fully realize how important this promise is and to know exactly what this promise means.

In a few minutes you will promise with the help of God and by the grace of God that you will continually turn your back on Satan and his temptations and serve only the Lord God. You will profess your faith in the Triune God of your salvation: **FATHER, SON and HOLY SPIRIT**. You will profess that you believe the whole Bible, all 66 books, every word of it to be inspired by God and true. You will profess allegiance to the Lutheran Church because you believe that in this church we teach the Bible in its truth and purity. You will promise to remain true to the Triune God and His Word, even if you will have to suffer death for your faith; and you will promise that you will continue to hear and learn the Word of God, and by God's power and strength in that Word, live according to it. You will be promising to give yourself entirely to your Savior-God: your heart, mind, body and soul.

Even though you will also be graduating from Peace Thru Christ Lutheran School you are not graduating by being confirmed but you are only beginning. You are not now ending your study of the Word and your catechism, but only beginning a lifelong service to God as a spiritually-mature Christian. One who is able to examine himself and profess his faith in his Savior.

It's like you have finished years of intensive training now to begin a race. In fact that is exactly what the author to the Hebrews tells us this morning in our text. The days, weeks, months and years of confirmation training---Catechism and Bible instruction---has come to an end and now the race begins.

James, Run with Perseverance the Race Marked Out for You

I: It is a Test of Endurance, won by many others.

II: Throw off whatever hinders and FIX YOUR EYES ON JESUS

James, this Race marked out for you is not a sprint, it is a marathon. A sprint needs a burst of energy and speed, a marathon needs energy, endurance and perseverance. Where is that energy, endurance and perseverance going to come from? From within you? Wrong!

But there are many who believe that. They tell you to trust in yourself, in your own character, in your own actions and deeds, in your opinions and desires, in your own resolve.

But you know that you have been taught to look at yourself as the Bible describes you by nature---spiritually dead and lost in sins, an enemy of Christ, unable to do anything to save yourself, unable to keep those 10 commandments, you recited for us this morning, perfectly as God demands.

But hasn't all of that changed? You are now a believer, a child of God, a member of His Kingdom and Church, soon to be a confirmed member of this congregation, so now you can rely on yourself, right? Still wrong!

That is exactly what Satan would love for you to believe.

What you have learned in the past, you will need to continue to learn in the future. What you put into practice in the past you will need to put into practice in the future. That is a continuing repentance of your sins and looking to Jesus and His Word for forgiveness and strength.

In chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews the author lists many of the Old Testament heroes of faith: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, David, Samuel and other prophets who gave of their lives for their Lord. He then begins the twelfth chapter with the words: **THEREFORE WE ALSO, SINCE WE ARE SURROUNDED BY SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES...**

The picture that he is drawing for us is one in which we are in a huge auditorium, with all the past saints in the stands, the past believers who have all finished running their race of life, who persevered to the end in Christ and received the Crown of Life. We look up and we see the Bible heroes of long ago, and the members of our congregation who died in the faith and now it is our turn, it is your turn James, your race has begun, how will you run?

The first encouragement is to be as lean as possible. **LET US LAY ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT, AND THE SIN THAT SO EASILY ENSNARES US...** When we allow one sinful temptation after another to ensnare us with its sinful pleasures and desires we are weighing ourselves down and our race becomes harder and harder to continue. The more we weigh ourselves down with the concerns and worries of this life, with the sinful enticements and allurements of this world the more spiritually tired and weary we become until finally we can't run the race anymore.

Even as there are many who have run that race marked out for them and reached the goal with Christ, so also there are many who started the race and gave up. They got spiritually lazy, tired, indifferent, distracted, didn't keep their eyes on the goal of eternity.

So the author to the Hebrews says to you, James, **FIX YOUR EYES ON JESUS!** That's what the past believers did who now surround us. They reached the goal of eternity by focusing on Christ and His Word. Anything that weighs us down; sins, temptations, decisions, advancements, situations that would draw us away from our goal in running our race, cast it aside. Throw your sins upon Jesus in godly sorrow and repentance. Cast all of your cares and worries upon the Lord. Lay aside all doubt and overcome every temptation by looking into God's Word and seeing in Christ your Savior and your Redeemer.

As we said this is not a sprint, it is a marathon. That is why the author to the Hebrews writes, **AND LET US RUN WITH ENDURANCE THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US...** Patience, effort and hard work goes into running the Race of Life. The goal of eternal life has already been secured for us. Christ has won and earned it for us. But before we can glory in it and enjoy it, there is a life to live, a race to run. Christ is the beginning of that race and the end of it. He is the Author of our faith, having sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts and He is the Finisher, the fulfillment of our faith, the One in whom we trust.

Jesus ran His Race of Life for us. He endured the agony of the cross, the shame of His suffering and He did it with joy! How? Our text says **WHO FOR THE JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM ENDURED THE CROSS, DESPISING THE SHAME, AND HAS SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD.**

Why did Jesus endure the agonies of Calvary, the sufferings of the cross, the rejection of His Father? Because He had a loving purpose. The joy of redeeming His people, you and me, made Him willing to endure all of this. He did not enter the valley of death grudgingly, no man took His life from Him. He gave it willingly, even joyfully in order to redeem us! That doesn't mean that it was easy. He saw the end result of His redeeming act and with a determined purpose Jesus set His face toward the grave and then rose again.

So also, as you begin your Race of Live, James, having seen and experienced the great love of your Savior for you, it is with confident joy and Christian determination that you will set your face toward the goal, **FIXING YOUR EYES ON JESUS** and run that race. Again your source of strength is Christ and His Word. It is the Means of Grace, the Gospel in the Word and in the Sacraments as they are administered.

But the race demands your full devotion, your full attention, your full and active participation. No one can run the race for you, not your parents, not your siblings, not me as your pastor.

Don't become distracted, wearied, tired, or drop out or you will never reach the goal and eternity will be lost to you.

The Lord God has led you to make this promise. The Holy Spirit has moved you to give yourself to Jesus and it is the Lord and His Word as your constant companion that will see you through this Race of Life that will give you the strength and assure you that you will make it to the finish line.

So let us end this morning's Confirmation sermon to you, James, with words from our Lord written by inspiration from the pen of the Apostle Paul: **I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST; IT IS NO LONGER I WHO LIVE BUT CHRIST LIVES IN ME; AND THE LIFE WHICH I NOW LIVE IN THE FLESH I LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD, WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME...**

FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST CONSTRAINS US, BECAUSE WE JUDGE THUS: THAT IF ONE DIED FOR ALL, THEN ALL DIED; AND HE DIED FOR ALL, THAT THOSE WHO LIVE SHOULD LIVE NO LONGER FOR THEMSELVES, BUT FOR HIM WHO DIED FOR THEM AND ROSE AGAIN...

DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT THOSE WHO RUN IN A RACE ALL RUN, BUT ONE RECEIVES THE PRIZE? RUN IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOU MAY OBTAIN IT.

Dear James, keep running in Christ, press on toward the goal for the prize and we will all see each other at the finish line in eternity.

Amen.