

I.N.I.

Pentecost/Confirmation Sunday
May 27, 2012
Ps. 61:1-5,8

In Christ Jesus, who hears the vows of His believers, and through the power of His Word gives them the ability and strength to fulfill those vows, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

During W.W.II few people knew better what it meant to stand within the shelter of a rock than the soldiers who defended the island of Malta in 1941. From the safe ledges of their rock-built caverns they watched day after day, unharmed as the bombing, fighting, chaos and confusion swirled on around them. Outside the rock there was danger and almost certain death, but inside the rock there was peace and safety.

What a striking illustration of that Rock to which the Christian flees. That Rock which is Christ and His Word. We have chosen as our theme for this morning's Confirmation sermon:

A CHRISTIAN SOLDIER'S CONFESSION

King David wrote this Psalm apparently when he was in great distress. He says, **HEAR MY CRY, O GOD; ATTEND TO MY PRAYER. FROM THE END OF THE EARTH I WILL CRY TO YOU, WHEN MY HEART IS OVERWHELMED; LEAD ME TO THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER THAN I.** This Psalm may have been written when David was forced to flee Jerusalem because of his son Absalom's rebellion. David was a soldier on the run, but even when the odds looked overwhelmingly against him, David had the confidence that the LORD is the ROCK that was higher than he. David used this picture of the Rock in other Psalms. We read in Ps. 18: **THE LORD IS MY ROCK AND MY FORTRESS AND MY DELIVERER; MY GOD, MY STRENGTH, IN WHOM I WILL TRUST;...FOR WHO IS GOD, EXCEPT THE LORD? AND WHO IS A ROCK, EXCEPT OUR GOD? IT IS GOD WHO ARMS ME WITH STRENGTH, AND MAKES MY WAY PERFECT...THE LORD LIVES! BLESSED BE MY ROCK! LET THE GOD OF MY SALVATION BE EXALTED.**

In Ps. 31 we read, **BOW DOWN YOUR EAR TO ME, DELIVER ME SPEEDILY; BE MY ROCK OF REFUGE, A FORTRESS OF DEFENSE TO SAVE ME. FOR YOU ARE MY ROCK AND MY FORTRESS; THEREFORE, FOR YOUR NAME'S SAKE, LEAD ME AND GUIDE ME.** And in Ps. 62 we read, **HE ONLY IS MY ROCK AND MY SALVATION; HE IS MY DEFENSE; I SHALL NOT BE GREATLY MOVED...IN GOD IS MY SALVATION AND MY GLORY; THE ROCK OF MY STRENGTH, AND MY REFUGE, IS IN GOD.**

Our Lord Jesus is the ROCK that is stronger than we, a ROCK that is higher than we, i.e. a ROCK that is above and stronger than the shifting sands of temporal things. Jesus and His Word is that ROCK to which you, Liam, are clinging to now and must cling to and live in for the rest of your life.

David renounces all trust in his own power and strength when he confesses that the LORD is the ROCK higher than he. Amazing, isn't it? Here is the powerful, mighty King of Israel confident, not in himself, but confident that his Savior God, who has been his refuge and tower in the past, will deliver him again and again. And that is your confidence as well. As you prepare to embark upon your calling as a mature Christian soldier for the Lord, your confession must be this same admission: **I AM WEAK, YOU ARE STRONG! I AM LOST IN SIN, YOU ARE MY SAVIOR FROM SIN!**

During these next few years you will be bombarded by every temptation Satan, this world and your own sinful flesh can think of. You will be leaving the relative security of junior high school

and childhood. As a Christian teenager you will be in the minority in this world. You will also be in the front lines of the battle, in the trenches, wherever you might be: at school, hanging out with your friends, at a party, at home, at a summer job. Satan is relentless, he never stops, never tires, never gives in. By yourself, you would be easy prey, you would be like a soldier with no weapons, famished and weak against an enemy with every weapon imaginable. And make no mistake about it, Satan's ultimate war plan is to capture you and spiritually destroy you.

Sounds scary, doesn't it? But you have the greatest weapon of all, the greatest defense. You have Jesus Christ, the ROCK that is higher than you are. This ROCK has said to you, **NEVER WILL I LEAVE YOU, NEVER WILL I FORSAKE YOU! SO WE MAY BOLDLY SAY: THE LORD IS MY HELPER; I WILL NOT BE AFRAID.**

Too often we think of our religion as something abstract. We think of it as a set of commandments or passages to be memorized or a list of doctrines to be learned. Too many people think of Christianity as what we saw earlier this morning. An examination of what you know in your head. Memorized answers and recited words.

Nothing could be further from the truth. At the heart and core of our faith is a glorious reality--the reality which has meaning for us everyday of our lives. The heart and core is our Savior, Jesus Christ. The real Savior who lived a perfect life for us here on earth. The real Savior who went to the cross to suffer and die for us. The real Savior who rose from the dead and conquered death for us. The real Savior who has ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us and will come again to take us to be with Him forever. The real Savior who has planted His Word of love and mercy, forgiveness and truth into your heart and mind to guide and protect you spiritually, to lead and provide you with spiritual strength in all of your battles. This real Savior has given you real LIFE, both a life of blessings and joys and purpose here on earth, and an everlasting life to look forward to in our heavenly home. All yours, all free!

You have learned this because the LORD has given you a wonderful heritage. David wrote in vs. 5 and 8: **FOR YOU, O GOD, HAVE HEARD MY VOWS; YOU HAVE GIVEN ME THE HERITAGE OF THOSE WHO FEAR YOUR NAME...SO I WILL SING PRAISE TO YOUR NAME FOREVER, THAT I MAY DAILY PERFORM MY VOWS.**

In a few minutes, you, Liam, will be coming before your Savior God and making your vows of faithfulness, promises to be faithful to your Lord and Savior and to the hearing of His Word till death. You will proclaim your promise to remain in the Christian faith and in His Church even if it means death, by the grace and help of God. How can you make this promise? Because **THE HERITAGE** of those who know the Lord Jesus has been passed on down to you. You have spent the last 3 years in an in-depth study of your Savior's Words of love for you. You have learned the meaning of God's forgiving love through Jesus in your life.

What a blessed heritage you have been given! Far greater than any earthly gift, that may last, at best, a lifetime, you have been given the gift of **FAITH, FORGIVENESS, SALVATION**. These are gifts that lead you into **ETERNAL LIFE**. What greater heritage, what greater gift could your parents have given you than to teach you about Jesus and His Word and bring you to the instruction that you received here at Peace Thru Christ? **The LORD HAS INDEED GIVEN YOU AN EVERLASTING HERITAGE.**

It is no wonder then that David's desire was to **ABIDE IN (THE LORD'S) TABERNACLE FOREVER, TO SING PRAISE TO (THE LORD'S) NAME FOREVER, AND TO DAILY PERFORM HIS VOWS**. That is also your desire today. Today you will be promising to remain a faithful hearer and student of God's Word until death. You will be promising to partake of the Lord's Supper frequently, as often as it is celebrated, for the strengthening of your faith life. You will be promising to proclaim your Savior's name throughout your lifetime, to daily **PERFORM your vows** in whatever walk of life you choose in your adult life.

But will that be your desire tomorrow, a year from now, four years from now when you graduate from high school, or when you begin your career in work or when you get married? It will be, if and only if, that heritage of God's Word remains your daily guide. Its up to you to feed yourself, feed yourself spiritual food, not the junk food of this world--man's wisdom and philosophy, materialism, worldly humanism, evolutionism--junk food that only leads to spiritual starvation and eternal death, but the good spiritual food of God's Word.

This is so serious. More serious than you even can realize right now. You will be standing here before God's altar, where many others have stood before. Many have made the same promises you will be making. Some of them no longer are fulfilling their vows, because they have lost sight of their heritage and have let go of the **ROCK, Jesus and HIS WORD**. Those that are still true and faithful to their vows have remained so because the Holy Spirit has filled them with a desire to **ABIDE IN THE LORD'S TABERNACLE, IN HIS PRESENCE, IN HIS POWERFUL WORD FOREVER**.

Some time back I read about the technique used to catch monkeys in the jungle. You drill a hole in a coconut, put some food in it and chain the coconut to a tree. The hole must be large enough for the monkey to slip his hand in but small enough so that he cannot get it out once he grabs the food. Grasping the food, the monkey is stuck. He doesn't want to let go of the food, and as a result is in bondage to the coconut. The hunters than merely come back and pick up the monkeys who, by their own choice, have bound themselves to the coconut.

We are often in the same position. Satan places coconuts with all kinds of allurements in our paths. We reach inside and grab hold of our freedom to do as we please, or disobedience to our parents, rebellion against society, or sexual immorality and fornication, or gambling, or cursing and swearing, or a countless other sins and we are trapped. In our foolish pride we will not let go. We want freedom, rights, happiness, peace and we think that we have it with our hand in the coconut of these temptations. But in all reality we are trapped in them and then the worries, concerns, cares and guilt of this life merely picks us up and has their way with us and makes us miserable. Satan's trap works. Only when we let go and release our hold on these temptations and sins are we safe.

As Adam's children we all enjoy self-indulgence and self-pity. Guard your heart and mind! When a temptation comes and beckons you to become indulged in yourself, to grab hold of it, look to Jesus and seek the help of the Holy Spirit to stir up praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. As a child of God, you do have a choice. Since your will has been made alive by the Holy Spirit, you can choose to live and walk in Christ Jesus, performing your vows or you can choose to live in your old Adam and the self-indulgence of sinful desires.

All of us who have been called to faith in Jesus have been called to be soldiers for Christ. We have been called to carry the banner of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection before us. To declare what God's Word declares: mankind is lost and condemned in sin. We are all, by nature, condemned because of our sins and by our own efforts can earn only eternal death. But our God of love sent His Son who lovingly gave of Himself for us, willingly put Himself under God's Law in perfect obedient love and willingly placed Himself upon the cross as our perfect sacrifice. This same Savior is our **ROCK!** in whom we live, to whom we cling.

Like David, we too are far from home, far from our real home God has prepared for us. Therefore as Christian soldiers we too must confess: **THE LORD IS THE ROCK HIGHER THAN I; THE LORD HAS GIVEN ME A WONDERFUL HERITAGE: I LONG TO DWELL IN HIS TABERNACLE FOREVER!**

May God grant this to you Liam and to all of us who call upon His name in faith.

Amen.