

Reformation Sunday
Pr. Bill Duffey
October 30, 2011

Today, at Peace Lutheran, we have four young adults Confirming their Baptism, which we also call Confirmation, after having covered the Old and New Testaments, Luther's Small Catechism, the Augsburg Confession and Smalcald Articles, and having reviewed their understanding of what it means to be Lutheran Christians by going through parts of Daniel Erlander's book *Baptized, We Live – Lutheranism As a Way of Life*, they are now ready to make public their statement of faith.

Our Confirmation years are during a busy time in these young people's life, with school studies and extra-curricular activities, but I feel that it is important that they have the opportunity to learn about the Lutheran understanding of The Faith during these years when they are, at the same time, developing their critical thinking skills as young adults.

It is only two more years and they will be graduated from High School and they will be going on into further education in life; be that in college, on the job training, in the military, or some other learning opportunities.

It is my prayer that in this brief time in which they have spent some effort in their Christian Education that they will have been nurtured in mature theological thought for their future years.

Does this time really make a difference in the lives of those who go through it?

I pray that it does, but you will have to talk with former Confirmation Youth, who are now older adults, and ask them if it made a difference in their lives, to see for sure.

Perhaps it is only in looking back over the years that we really know of its importance for us.

From our Gospel Lesson for today, In John 8:31-32 we hear Jesus say:

If you continue in my Word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

As we take the Bible into our hands and read God's WORD for us, it is interesting to consider how different passages have broken into people's lives, grabbed hold of them, and brought them face to face with God in such a way that they can no longer avoid God, or push past Him, or pretend that they do not see Him, but are grasped by God's WORD in such a way that they have to give their answer and their decision to Him right then and there.

St. Augustine, while in a religious and spiritual crises heard a child's voice crying over and over again, "Take up and read" probably as part of a child's game, but listening to that voice he picked up the Bible that was lying in front of him and read:

Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Romans 13:13-14)

Of this passage from Romans Augustine writes:

No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.

The poet William Cowper writes that the all important Scripture passage for him comes from Romans 3:25:

Whom God put forth as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. (Romans 3:25)

Martin Luther, in his work to try and understand St. Paul's letter to the Romans in preparation to lecture on it struggled with Paul's statement: "the justice of God."

Luther writes concerning this experience:

I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage

Him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against Him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through the doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul's became to me a gate to heaven...

I have asked these four young adults who are Confirming their Baptism today to choose a Bible verse that has grasped a hold of them at this time in their lives – it may not be that verse that has brought them face to face with God in such a way that they can no longer avoid God, or pretend that God does not have a claim upon all they are, say and do, but I pray that it is a beginning down that path for them.

Discipleship requires our consistency as learners.

That is why we have Confirmation Day on Reformation Sunday, at the end of the month of October, and at the beginning of a new School Year, for Confirmation is not the ending of our learning about God's WORD for us but the beginning.

If you continue in my Word you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

If we continue in our relationship with Christ Jesus we will truly be His disciples and we will know God's TRUTH and God's TRUTH will set us free from our sins.

True discipleship leads to true freedom, and true freedom (which is a gift from God) comes from our obeying God's expressed will for us.

A short story:

When the slaves in Jamaica were emancipated many of them climbed to the summit of the highest hill near where they lived, to not miss a moment of the New Day.

When the tip of the sun's rim peaked above the eastern horizon they then laughed, wept, sang, danced, and prayed. And all together they cried out in happy ecstasy: FREE!!! FREE!!! FREE!!! FREE AT LAST!!!

Do you know that there were slaves who when offered their individual freedom shrank back from it?

They were afraid of freedom for they did not know what they would do with their freedom, so they chose to continue in servitude to their master.

We may think that that is incredible that a person would choose slavery over freedom, but perhaps we have made similar choices in our lives without recognizing it.

Perhaps we have chosen to stay in slavery to a certain sin rather than move into the freedom offered to us by Christ Jesus' death and resurrection.

Perhaps we have said to ourselves and maybe even to others, "On the whole, this sin has been quite good to me."

God does not make us into robots, God does not force us to choose freedom over slavery to sin, but God freely offers to us the choice.

We can choose to stay in our sins.

We can choose to move into our freedom from those sins.

We can choose to fall back into our sins.

God gives us the freedom to choose.

But the fact remains: if we choose to continue in His WORD, we shall know the truth, and the truth will make us free!!!

It is my prayer that not only these young adults Confirming their Baptisms today, but all of us as well will continue to TAKE UP OUR BIBLES and READ THEM and in so doing that all of us will be brought face to face with God in such a way that we will have to give Him our answer and decision concerning our future relationship with Him right then and there.

Amen.