Sermon — 05/24/23

*(6th Grade Graduation)*

Text — 1 Corinthians 12:3

….no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

Theme — “Not By My Own Reason or Strength”

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Tonight we celebrate with our 6th graders, their families, and our school as they graduate. It is indeed a milestone in their lives. For some of them, this is the only school they have ever known. For others, it has been their educational home for less time. But it is STILL their educational home. The place where they have worked and learned. The place where they have made friends and had fun. The place where they have grown up. And next year, it will all be different. A different school. Different teachers. Different classmates. So there is, I am sure, at least SOME measure of trepidation and uncertainty about what will come next fall.

This coming Sunday is, on the Church calendar, The Day of Pentecost. The day in which the Holy Spirit came with such power and might upon those early Christians in Jerusalem, 50 days after Christ’s Easter resurrection. They too would have been feeling some of those same emotions as our graduates (and their families): nervousness and anxiety, wonderment about what is next, exhilaration and anticipation as to how God will use them to advance His kingdom. So, let’s talk tonight about these things. (pause)

If you know me, then you know that I love the catechism. Luther wrote the Small Catechism almost 500 years ago. But it is still, I believe, the greatest and best summary of the Christian faith. It still speaks to us today. It still provides a great framework for teaching the faith. And how does Luther begin EVERY section of that catechism? With these words: ***“As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household.”*** That is, God has given these children to THESE parents. And they are given the primary responsibility for teaching the faith to their children. Yes, moms and dads are supposed to feed/clothe/shelter their kids. They are to protect and defend them. They are to guide and direct them. They are to love and nurture them. But the MOST important task that God has given you parents is this: to teach your children the Christian faith.

And, of course, there are many ways in which you do that. Even as babies you do that. And, you will do that until the day you die — for you never stop being a parent. So, you bring your children to church. You teach them their prayers. You teach them right and wrong, as the commandments make clear. You point out their sins — and the consequences of those sins, both earthly and eternal. But most of all, you teach them about Jesus. About God’s love and grace. About how He has come from heaven to be our Savior. Taking our place in life and death. Perfectly keeping the commandments (which we cannot) and giving us the credit. Dying on the cross to pay for our sins. Rising on Easter to open heaven to us. Ascending into heaven to rule all things and to show us where we too will go one day.

It’s a big job, this teaching the faith to our children. One that often seems overwhelming. And one for which we sometimes feel unprepared and unworthy. But, parents, God has chosen YOU for a reason. And He will give you the necessary tools and qualities to carry out that task. And one of the ways — one of the tools — He has given us here is our day school. Not that the school and its teachers/staff are to REPLACE you in that teaching of the faith. Oh, heavens, no! But rather to supplement/to assist/to echo your teaching at home.

So, graduates of the Our Savior’s class of 2023, what have you learned here? Well, you learned lots of things. You learned to read, write, and do arithmetic. You learned science and history and geography. You learned to play and get along with others. You learned how to express your gifts in art and music and creative writing. You have learned important things; you have learned seemingly UNIMPORTANT things (like what the word “penultimate” means). You learned to stand in front of large groups without fear and yet perform well — as you have done, year after year, in our school’s musicals and Christmas programs. Every year, I am amazed and proud of how you students grow and mature.

But the most important thing you have learned here — something that you have heard every day here, if we have done our jobs — is that God loves YOU. Despite your sins. And there are indeed many sins, aren’t there? You know that even better than I do. You have learned the commandments and so you know what God expects/demands from you: to be perfect. In everything. Every day. All the time. To perfectly love God above all things, and your neighbor as yourself. And you have learned that you do NOT measure up. None of us do. Or can. No, we need a Savior.

And that Savior you have learned to know here, as well. Jesus Christ. The Son of God and Son of Mary. Fully human and fully God. Human, like us, so that He could do what we fail to do. God, so that He could accomplish that task which is beyond our abilities. And so He HAS perfectly loved. He HAS perfectly kept every commandment, every day, in all situations. And He then gives YOU the credit. So, when God looks at you and all other Christians, He sees that perfect righteousness of Christ’s covering you. In Christ, you ARE perfect. And your sins? Well, they have been washed away in the blood of Christ. The blood shed for you on the cross. Jesus has suffered the full punishment for you (and me). The hell that ought to be ours has become His! And He has taken that punishment simply because He loves YOU with that perfect, almighty, unconquerable love.

That love — that Gospel — is the greatest gift you could ever receive. And your parents wanted you to have it with all their hearts. That is why they have sent you here, to our day school. Not because we have the best teachers (although we do). Not because of the small class size and terrific student-to-teacher-ratio (although we do have that too). Not because our students never do anything wrong and so you are protected here in a way you couldn’t be in a larger school (because you know our students are sinners too). No. The primary reason your parents chose our school is because of that Gospel message and teaching. Because it alone gives eternal life. Jesus saves sinners. And YOU are a sinner. But, by the grace of God, you are a FORGIVEN sinner. All because of what Jesus has won for you, and what the Holy Spirit has given you, And that brings us to our sermon text tonight: *“….no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”* (pause)

You say — you CONFESS — that Jesus is Lord. That is, He is God and your Savior. You believe what He has done. And that He has done it for YOU. And that you put your trust in Him alone for forgiveness and salvation and life. So, as St. Paul reminds us in that verse, that PROVES you have the Holy Spirit. He has come upon you, just as He did those believers in Jerusalem 50 days after Easter. Oh, maybe not with the same spectacular and miraculous signs given them: the tongues of fire and gift of speaking in other languages. But you have had the same Spirit given you — with the same result: faith in Christ. And the same confession of that faith. Jesus IS Lord. Lord of creation, as the Almighty God. But also, YOUR Lord. Your Savior. The One who rules YOUR heart and life, because you have come to know His love for you.

He is the One who gives you life in this world and everything you need in it. He feeds you. He clothes you. He shelters you. He heals you. He protects you. And He will continue to do so. Not because you deserve it, but simply because He is your loving Father who wants you to have all good things.

He is the One who has redeemed you — that is, He has bought you back. You see, there is a price to be paid for sin. A price to deliver us from sin/death.devil. And our Lord Jesus has paid that price. He has carried your sin. He has tasted your death. He has suffered your hell. And in exchange He gives you His perfection and righteousness — and all that it deserves. That is, He gives you heaven! Eternal life. A seat at His banquet table. A place in His family, as His son or daughter forever.

And He is the One who gives you all this. For that is the special and great work of the Holy Spirit. On your own, you never could — or would — believe it. That is how deep of a hold sin has taken on us by nature. But the Holy Spirit has come to plant that faith in your heart. To tend and nurture it. To grow it and to bring it to fruition and harvest. So, you believe in Jesus — because the Spirit has given you that faith. And He will keep you in that faith until He brings you to heaven.

And He does all that through the Gospel. That is, in the Word and sacraments. In the Bible and its teaching (which you have received here and at home). In baptism, where your sins were washed away and you were covered in Christ’s righteousness. In the Lord’s Supper, where we eat and drink the very Body and Blood of Christ which have won all this for us.

That’s why it is important — even vital — for us to remain connected to those Means of Grace (the Word and sacraments). For they are the pipeline by which the Holy Spirit brings that salvation to us. So, graduates — and the rest of you! — do not neglect to hear and read and study that Word of God each day. Each day, remember your baptism and what God has given you there. Rejoice in receiving the Lord’s Supper and its gifts. For that is how the Spirit will keep your faith strong. (pause)

At the beginning of the sermon tonight, I mentioned that there may well be some unease mixed in with your joy. Yes, it has been wonderful to be here at our school. But what does the future hold? Well, I don’t know. Only God knows. But this I DO know: God will be with you in the future, just as He has been in the past. Because you are His dear children and He loves you. So much that He suffered all — even death on a cross and hell itself — just to have you as His own. And you know that He will never, ever leave you or forget you. So, we indeed say by the power of the Holy Spirit: *“Jesus is MY Lord!”* Now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Wed — LSB #498 (*“Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest”*)