

Faithful Is He that Calls You

I Thessalonians 5:23-24, Pentecost Sunday

Confirmation Day, May 19, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....In the Springtime we are all quite aware many birds build their nests and hatch their young. For a time the young chicks are fed by their parents, and then when they are ready to fly, the father or mother literally pushes them out of the nest. Hopefully they make it. In some ways this might be how we think of confirmation. Their catechism instruction is completed, after many years of Sunday school, and after confirmation we require no more study. The confirmands are now able to examine themselves.

For those of us who are older and more experienced, we know what lies before these confirmands is quite intimidating. It is a world filled with temptation, and one is exposed to it more and more in the teenage years, and when the young leave the nest. But by the grace of God, the situation is quite unlike those birds who push their young out of the nest. In the Holy Christian Church on earth, believers always have a safe place of rest to return to when they are tired and weary of this world. By faith they return to the safe arms of Christ, when they return to the Means of Grace. When we are saddened by our sins, or tired and weary of all this world's temptations, or our hearts long simply to be in heaven with Christ our Good Shepherd, all we need to do is remember our blessed baptism whereby God made us holy, or we go to Holy Communion, there receiving the body and blood of Christ, or we simply open our Bibles at home and read the Living Words of Christ. "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." Today as we consider the work of sanctification and God's faithfulness to us, let us rejoice we are never pushed out of the nest, but we daily have a safe haven in the Means of Grace God has given to us, for it is there Christ's faithfulness to us is most clear. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". Dear Confirmand, "Faithful is He that calls you, who also will do it."

I. The work of the Holy Ghost is sanctification. Paul begins our lesson by saying, "Now the very God of Peace, sanctify you wholly" which means entirely. To sanctify means to "make holy". How is this done? How does God make such unholy sinners as ourselves holy?....by the blood of Jesus Christ. This brings us to the Pentecost sermon Peter preached to the people gathered there from all nations. After he revealed to them that the Christ they crucified was both God and Lord, "when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2:37-39

When we are infants, the Holy Spirit sanctifies and makes us holy by our Holy Baptism so we become members of the Holy Christian Church on earth. Then and there we were are "born again, not by corruptible seed, but incorruptible by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever." Baptism then is "not simple water only, but it is the water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word." Luther calls it a "gracious water of life" and Paul explains to Titus "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the

Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

What does baptism do? It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal life to all who believe. Thus on Pentecost when we remember the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, understand He was poured out then in Holy Baptism, and He is still poured out today in Holy Baptism, for "the promise is unto you and your children." Let it also be said wherever the Gospel Word is still preached or taught today, there the Holy Spirit also is being poured out, even gaining entrance into the heart of man. Let no man then resist the Holy Spirit, but gladly receive Him for He brings grace.

Hence today we remember these two young men were long ago baptized, and that is when and how the Holy Spirit first made them holy. Moreover their parents did as Jesus commanded, "Feed my lambs", for these lambs are precious in His sight, and their names are written in heaven. These lambs grew then by the Word of God, the Bread of Life, and they were fed such bread in family devotions at home, and the word taught in church and Sunday School, and from the pulpit. They ate. They fed. They grew in God's grace and were satisfied. They saw their sins by the law and they saw their Savior by the Gospel! Constantly throughout their life, the Holy Spirit has continued to teach them and will teach them if they hold faithful. These are the sons of God who now cry Abba Father.

Still today in their hearts then they know and treasure their song of childhood, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so, little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong. YES Jesus loves me!" This is the song of faith, as long as we believers live. When we are troubled by our sins, cast down, dejected, we pray, for the Lord has promised, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me." Because Jesus is our God of peace, we remember how this peace was attained by His cross. As True Man on the cross, Jesus suffered the penalty of all men, in our place, as our Brother. As True God Jesus had all power to do what is impossible for man, pay the whole and entire debt we owed to God the Judge, not with gold or silver, but His "holy precious blood" that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom. When God the Father then in heaven above looked down upon God the Son, He saw a sacrifice wholly acceptable which moved His angry heart from wrath to peace. God, for Christ's sake forgave all men all sins. God was turned and reconciled. This is why Jesus is ever and always our peace. NO SHEEP of Christ ever need be fearful of Christ, for "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out!" Confess your sins, lay them all out before Him, for His blood covers all! God's sheep know this, for "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

II. The blameless life God would have us live. Now once again returning to our text, Paul says "I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!" First remember the only blameless life lived was by Christ, and we are justified by His life and not our own. Our works are sinful, His works alone good. And so, speaking of Jesus the Bible says "By the obedience of one, many shall be made righteous." But since He redeemed us from the devil's power by forgiving our sins, we now seek to live a holy and

blameless life to His glory and not our own. In this world we by faith always strive for perfection, but never attain such in this life. Thus the holy sanctified life of the believer happens in two ways; FIRST we renounce and resist temptation, and SECOND by faith and love we keep His commandments which are not grievous. This brings us full circle to Baptism and confirmation. In both we renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways. Also in Baptism and the Gospel Word, there is true and real strength to resist the devil, to resist temptation, even overcome. Our catechism says "By baptism we are made partakers of Christ. Now we who are baptized should daily repent of all sins, shun everything that is evil, and walk in newness of life." Therefore understand dear confirmand, if you are to successfully resist and overcome the devil, you need a constant source of strength for the spiritual battle - namely the Means of Grace.

God now adds to your arsenal, so to speak, another weapon, the Lord's Supper. Now that you are able to examine yourself and see your sins and discern the Lord has put His true Body and Blood in the Sacrament, even the "remission of sins", such will help you to resist and overcome temptation. Regarding such temptations remember Psalm one. "Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." When the world tempts you to be a free spirit, namely they tempt you to break God's commandments as if such are bad - realize to break free of God's commandments is to go back into the bondage and slavery of sin. Those who promise "freedom" are themselves captives of sin. Yet understand by paying for your sins Christ set you free and He commands no good works from you. You are forgiven of all your evil works. But being forgiven, what now do you do? Your life becomes a living sacrifice. Good works are nothing more than the fruit of faith. "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me."

How wonderful to know now you have the promise of the Spirit, that He will help you both to will and to do His good pleasure. He will help you to walk a different path from the world. Throughout your life then do not forget God's commandments. Review them daily as Luther did. Love God with all your heart and soul and mind, and love thy neighbor as thyself, as Christ loved and still loves thee. Throughout your life God's commandments do two things for you. They reveal your sin so you do not become proud but are constantly humbled, and also they reveal the way you should go. When you come to a fork in the road, God's commandments are like a sign pointing the way you should go. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Always remember however, you are not saved by the commandments, but Jesus kept and fulfilled the entire law for you. His righteousness alone saves you, for you really have none of your own, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

III. Faithful is He that calls you. Our last verse for the day is "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." This "calleth" is not past tense, but present tense. Yes the Holy Spirit called you by the Gospel in the past, through Baptism, but this call, His call is still active and working in you now, present tense. Even now His holy call is working in you and through you,

enabling you to do good works to God's glory. But most important, see and find in this passage your strength, for you are not saved nor preserved by your faithfulness to God, but God's faithfulness to you. We are not strong sheep with a fearless faith, we are frail and trembling sheep whose only strength is God. The wolf is constantly at the door, but Christ stands by and with and before us, and He's by our side upon the plain. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it." Faithful is He that calls you, who also will do it!"

If then you are like that bird pushed out of the nest, always understand every time you return to the Means of Grace, you are in your safe place, a place of rest and peace, the bosom, the arms of Jesus your Good Shepherd who gave His life for you. God is not only the Author of your faith, but the Finisher. He doesn't say "Good luck, you're on your own" but "Lo I am with you always" and "Fear not only believe." When you are tired and weary, discouraged or depressed by sin, remember your holy baptism and "commune often to receive strength for a holier life" All the strength you need to be faithful to the end will be found in the Means of Grace. There is your true home for there you will always hear the voice of your Good Shepherd. What does He say in, by, and through these Means of Grace? "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. Where sin abounds grace does much more abound and though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow."

Therefore dear sons of God, "Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." Deut. 31:6 Likewise, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Rejoice on this blessed day, for not only are you dear sons of this congregation which loves you, but are are by grace through faith, sons of God Himself. Therefore may "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." Amen.