

**Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. <sup>24</sup> He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.**

**<sup>25</sup> “All this I have spoken while still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.**

**<sup>28</sup> “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup> I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. (NIV84)**

Theme: The Lord is Faithful in Keeping his Promises.

This time of year there are two major events which people celebrate: graduations and confirmations. What is the difference between the two? Many people look at them as being similar if not the same, but there are some important differences. A graduation is the celebration of an end. When you graduate from high school you are celebrating the end of your high school education. A graduate is not going to return to his high school the next year to keep on learning, that's not how it works; he's moving to bigger and better things: going off to college, joining the military, or entering the workforce. That is what a graduation is—someone has completed a course of study and now is moving on to something else.

What about a confirmation? It is true that like a graduation, you have completed a course of study—after three years of hard work, you have now learned the basics of what the Bible teaches. And now you wish to confess your faith. That is what a confirmation is; it is a public profession of faith—that you have been taught the basics of God's Word and that you believe and agree with it; and that since you believe that we teach God's Word in its truth and purity, you desire to become a communicant member. And then, being perfectly united in all

doctrine and practice, we invite you to join in the Lord's Supper with us as we declare our oneness in faith together.

So a confirmation in its essence is different than a graduation. But there is something else that you do at your confirmation that makes it even more different than a graduation. You make promises to God. In just a few short minutes, you'll stand before God's altar and in the presence of this congregation you will make two main promises. I will ask you two questions: “Do you intend to continue steadfast in this teaching and to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from it?” And, “Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God's Word, to be faithful in the use of the Word and sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as long as you live?” And you will respond to both questions, “I do and I ask God to help me.”

Think about those promises you are about to make, and take them seriously. You will promise first to continue steadfast in the true teaching; and that you'd rather die than fall away from the truth. I don't think too many confirmands make this promise intending not to keep it. And yet it holds true time and time again that many confirmands will eventually break this promise. They begin to listen to friends of family who question certain teachings of God; or science and society which reject anything that can't be explained. Or they go find someone to scratch their itching ears—someone who will tell them what they want to hear not what they need to hear from God's Word. And then they fail to keep their promise of remaining in the one true faith.

The second promise you are about to make is that you will remain faithful in your life to God's Word and that you will be faithful in your use of the means of grace. That means you will attend worship services on a regular basis—and not just when it's convenient for you. It means that you'll kneel before the Lord's altar to receive his true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins in his Holy Supper whenever you possibly can. It also means that you realize that although you've completed a course of study, your study of God's Word is far from over; but it is a lifelong endeavor. Unlike a graduation, your education is not complete; you have only been taught the basics; there is more to know and learn—and you will do that at home by reading your Bible

and here at Church by worshiping and attending Bible study. Don't be satisfied with what you know but continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord until your knowledge is made complete when you get to heaven. But again, there are many who fail to keep this promise that they make at their confirmation. That's because many people see this as a graduation—that they know all they really need to know and so they never study God's Word ever again. Or they get caught up in the things of the world, thinking that school, or work, or family, or fun, or sleep is more important than God and his Word; and then they aren't so faithful.

When you look at the promises you are about to make and the people who have gone before you in making those promises, one thing is immediately apparent: you won't keep them perfectly.

You, like, everyone else here today, are a sinner. Today, you intend to be faithful to God and his Word; but you won't always be faithful to God and his Word. We stumble, we fall. We get caught up into sins; our friends, family, or co-workers will try to convince us to do something other than worship the Lord or study his Word; and at times, we may listen to them. The things of this world will tug and pull at you for your attention and love. Society will attack the basic teachings of Scripture and doubts will arise in your hearts. Today you will make a promise to intend to be faithful; but you know that at times you won't keep your promises.

And what does the Lord say to begin our text? **If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching... He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.** Jesus is not saying that if you sin you are an unbeliever. Rather those who love God and believe in him will always strive to obey his commands. Just because we fail to keep his law perfectly isn't an excuse to do whatever we want. Those who believe in the Lord are those who love him and if we love the Lord we will always try to do what he says, without making excuses as to why we can't.

But today, your confirmation day, is not really about you and the promises you are about to make. Rather, today, as we do every day, we focus on the promises of Christ that he makes to you. He gave these promises to his disciples in the upper room on Maundy Thursday. In a few short hours he would be betrayed and arrested. The Jewish leaders mocked and ridiculed him; the Romans at the hands of Pontius Pilate beat him, put a crown of thorns on his head,

flogged him, and eventually crucified him. Less than 24 hours after Jesus said these words, he would die. He would be taken from his disciples. But before he left he wanted to comfort and encourage them; and so he gave them these promises which still stand for us today.

The first thing Jesus promised to send his disciples was the Holy Spirit. **The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.** It was the Holy Spirit who came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, 10 days after Jesus ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit enabled them to understand the Scriptures and everything that Jesus said and did while he was on earth with them.

The Holy Spirit is the one who worked faith into your hearts when your parents brought you to the font to be baptized, through which you were welcomed into his family. It was the Holy Spirit who worked through the Word that you heard in Sunday School and in Confirmation Class. He is the one who strengthened your faith and increased your knowledge of him and his Word. This is such a gracious gift because faith, which we could never gain on our own, receives all the blessings that Christ won for us.

Jesus then promises, **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.** The peace that Jesus promises to give you isn't like the peace that the world offers. The world likes to talk about peace among men and among countries—hoping that everyone will learn to live among each other and simply get along.

But that is not the type of peace that Jesus is talking about here. He is talking about the peace that only he can give—the peace of forgiveness, being at peace with God. By his perfect life, suffering, death, and resurrection he has removed the guilt of all your sins—even the times when you have failed to keep his promises. He has paid for their eternal punishment and has given us his perfect life. Our sins separated us from God; but since our sins have been removed we are not in a right relationship with God. We are now at peace with him who has declared us not guilty on account of Christ. You don't have to be afraid about your sins and the many times you have failed to obey God's commands. You have the peace of mind knowing that

your sins will not condemn and the peace of mind knowing that when you die you'll join our Lord in heaven forever.

Which brings us to Jesus' next promise: **I am going away and I am coming back to you.** Jesus isn't here right now. He is on his throne in heaven watching over you and guarding and protecting you from all harm and danger. But soon—at any time he will be coming back.

And on that day, the Last Day, he will judge all people, raise everyone from the dead and give life to your lifeless bodies. And then he will take all believers to live with him in heaven.

So Jesus promises you the gift of eternal life. And this is yours not because of anything you have done or could ever do. It is given to you as a gift from our gracious Lord. Life in heaven is a perfect life free from sin and the effects of sin and it lasts forever!

Today you are going to make two main promises to the Lord. Today Jesus promises you: his Holy Spirit who creates and strengthens faith through the gospel, which receives the blessings that Christ has promised you, the peace of forgiveness and being at peace with God, and the sure hope of eternal with him because of his life, suffering and death, and resurrection.

You will fail to keep your promises. But where you are faithless the Lord is faithful. All of his promises have come true and will come true. There is no reason to doubt or to be skeptical about what he promises to give you and has given you already. The words that Jesus speaks and everything written in the Bible are the very words of God. And as the psalmist says in Psalm 33, **The word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.** Or as David says in Psalm 145, **The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.**

This love and faithfulness to his is what motivates to live a life that is pleasing to him. It is the keeping of his promises that leads you to make the promises you are about to make and to strive to keep them. And you do so not reluctantly, but willingly and cheerfully, out of love and thanks to him, knowing that the Lord will help you keep them through the means of grace. And when you fail to keep your promises, the Lord is faithful and he promises to forgive you!

As you can see, a confirmation is not the same as a graduation. A graduation is an end. And as you will promise, your confirmation is the beginning of a life-long study of God's Word, faithful worship,

and the frequent partaking of Holy Communion. In a few moments you will stand before God and make some promises; but more important are the promises that the Lord has graciously made to you—you are at peace with God now and will be forever; because he is your faithful Lord and Savior. Amen.