
Sermon – 5th Easter/Confirmation Sunday

John 16:12-22

May 19, 2019

“Four Words of Faith”

During the final examination for students, a confirmand was asked to list the Ten Commandments and told they could list them in any order. She thought for a moment and then with considerable poise answered; 3, 6, 1, 8, 4, 5, 9, 2, 10, and 7.”

I shall impose no such test upon you – I don’t think you could possibly come up with a better response! But I would like you to remember 4 words – preferably in the order I give them to you - that express in beautiful simplicity the Christian faith. To prepare for this “test”, I’d like you to turn in the green hymnbooks to page 201. I’ll read the “pledge” at the top of the page that a confirmand is asked to make, and I want you to answer (as Megan will shortly) *“I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.”*

This “pledge” is made right after a confirmand has *“made public profession of their faith.”* Statements like the Apostle’s Creed are simply summaries of what we believe – enduring because they transcend time and culture – true because they speak about what God has revealed to us – not what we think about God. In our lesson from John, Jesus says the Holy Spirit *“will guide you into all truth.”* He says; *“the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”* Jesus didn’t want to *“give (us) more than you can bear”*. Neither do I, so through four simple words I want to speak to you who have or soon will ask God to *‘confirm your faith, guide your life, empower your serving, give you patience in suffering, and bring you to eternal life.’* The first word is the longest...so brace yourself.

That word is “ought”. In his explanation of the faith in which we’re baptized – the Apostle’s Creed, Martin Luther said of God we surely “ought” to “thank”, “praise”, “serve” and “obey” him.

To be a Christian is first of all to acknowledge we are under obligation to God. For years I’ve assigned confirmation students short essays on the promises they will make when they affirm their faith – the very ones you have at the top of page 201 of your hymnbook. Most wrote about the promise to *“live among God’s faithful people”*. So we talked about how worship of God arises from obligation. Most of Lutheran worship is about what God has done for us, and only at the very end, when told to *“go in peace to love and serve the Lord”*, do we even hint at a response – what we might (and ought) do for God.

The words thank and praise suggest *“come to church on Sunday morning worship”* But “serve and obey” are about that very tail end of worship and press the question *“how are you going to represent the name of Jesus Christ after you put your bulletin down, turn your sermon notes in, close the hymnbook, and answer those words “go in peace, serve the Lord”* with the obligatory Lutheran response “Thanks be to God”. Which is worship language! We ought to do quite a bit of serving, but if it’s not in response to what God has done for us nor done with thankfulness – it’s simply not an act of worship.

The second word is “may”. In discussing our Savior’s work, Luther said *“all this He has done that I “may” be his own, “live” under him in his kingdom, and “serve” him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness”*.

To be a Christ follower is a privilege to be enjoyed and a possibility explored. Think of Luther's use of this word "may" in the permission giving sense, like when you were little kids and played a game of "Captain May I". Jesus Christ wants you to move along in your faith – to get closer to "the captain" as it were. Through the grace of Christ you have "permission" to be different in a good and godly way, to "freak people out" or to put it another way, make em curious to know what you got that they don't.

The third word is "has". In discussing the Holy Spirit's work, Luther said, "*the Holy Spirit "has" called (you) through the gospel, "enlightened" (you) with his gifts, "sanctified" and kept (you) in true faith.*"

Jesus said in John that's what the Spirit is for. In the Holy Spirit's book – the Bible, you have a spiritual compass that always points true. Because the Spirit *has* done his work you have the twin Christian pillars of humility and assurance holding you up every day. Pastor Max Lucado put it this way, *you know your goodness can't win God's love, nor can your badness lose it.*" No one is outside the orbit of God's love, therefore no one should be outside the orbit of your love simply because they behave like a human being.

Because of this little word "has" you can't, spiritually speaking, be "plutoed", like the poor little rock that used to be our solar system's 9th planet, orbiting the fringes of cold space, staying on course till a few years ago some astronomer with way too much time on his hands concluded it didn't meet the necessary criteria for a planet anymore...so he and his pals "decertified" it. The Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, protects.... and never on a whim "decertifies".

These three words – "*ought, has and may*" explain who God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are and what they have done. But faith is personal not just creedal, so we need to discuss you. What word explains you - the little "blondie with curls" you who when she was good was very good, and when she was bad - was awful? What would it be – Complicated? Conflicted? We'll sort of.

You're a conjunction! The fourth word and the one that pertains to you is, "and". You are a "saint" and "sinner". You come under God's "law" and "gospel". You belong to a kingdom that is "here now" and is "still to come". When good you can be very good *and* when bad you can be – just plain awful!

Yet to be a Christian is to love this little word because Jesus loves sinners. When before the throne of God in your sinfulness you might otherwise barely be able to lift your head for fear of your judge's countenance, you'll look instead into the eyes of a Savior. So, you *ought* to look to that day with joy. You *may* not understand why all this grace *has* been given to you, but it has. "*It is a great miracle,*" Soren Kierkegaard once said, "*that God the Father is able to create something out of nothing. But it is a greater miracle that God the Son fashions saints out of sinners.*"

Jesus said "*everything that the Father has is mine – and the Holy Spirit has given it to you.*" Can you believe that? Once more confirm your faith, saying' "*I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.*"
AMEN