

JUNIOR CONFIRMATION

May 3, 2015

*John 15:1-8: **“Don’t Leave Me!”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I think that I can speak for every Christian parent when I say that it would be a wonderful gift to receive a certificate when a child is born that guarantees that the child will know and believe in Jesus, abide with Him throughout life, and finally enter into heaven. What a horrible thing it was for king David when his son Absalom rejected the coming Savior. David deeply loved his son Absalom. Still, his son proceeded to betray him, he took over the nation of Israel, and then he forced his father David to flee for his very life. At the death of his son Absalom, David just about lost his mind in grief - literally. One of his generals had to talk him back to sensible thinking. In the end, David was compelled to leave it all in God's hands, trusting in him no matter what - which is no easy thing!

The feelings that faithful pastors have when they confirm a new member is kind of like the feeling that a parent has for a child. We don't want to lose any of you to unbelief. We want to protect you from the thinking of this unbelieving world by giving you truth by which you might take your stand. We are all too aware of how the devil is like a roaring lion seeking to devour you by promising satisfaction in doing wicked things. And, as the years have gone by, we pastors have had to endure that helpless feeling as some of our people wonder away from the flock. I pray that this will not happen to any of us gathered here.

The truth is that it is in our power to say "no" to God. He doesn't try to force us to love him. He simply gives his forever love. Every day we are faced with two possibilities - two ways. There is the way that is easy and leads to destruction and many chose to go down this way. And then there is the way that is hard - the death of sin - and leads to life and only a few find this path by God's grace. You can sense the seriousness in the words of Jesus when he says in our Gospel lesson, "abide in me, and I in you." Jesus is pleading with you: **"Don't Leave Me!"**

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser," Jesus says, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine: you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

No one can look into the heart. This morning, on the basis of outward confession, you are branches connected to the vine of Jesus Christ. Like any branch, you receive your life from the vine. And whatever good fruit you bear, it is because you are connected to the vine through what we Lutherans call the means of grace. In the Word and Sacraments we meet Jesus and are connected to him. It is therefore always the devil's objective to separate us from the means of grace, for he knows that if we are disconnected from Jesus, we will become dead branches and will ultimately be cut off from the vine. The devil does this by using unbelievers to change our thinking while enticing us into sin, or he may use unbelievers to attack us while even turning our lives upside down so that we learn to think that God does not love us.

The ability to overcome such attacks is to remain in the promises of Christ. Again he pleads with us, **"Don't Leave Me!"** He promises that he will never leave us. When in doubt, we look to the pity and kindness of God. In Jesus Christ we behold the vine. This vine is a perfect vine who has lived a perfect

life for us that we might have life. He has done all that needs to be done on our behalf. He has nailed our sins, death, and the devil to the cross that we might escape punishment. And by rising from the dead, Jesus has given us victory. Because he is a victorious vine, and we are branches connected to him, we have his victory. He has overcome all attacks, and has confounded the devil and the unbelieving world by rising from the dead. He has buried our sins with him in Baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life!

We can overcome if we do not leave Jesus. As I already stated, He will never leave nor forsake us! And this can only happen if we use the means of grace. It is through the reading and preaching of the Bible that we hear the voice of Jesus. We live our Baptisms whenever we die to sin and live in forgiveness, whenever we confess our sins and are cleansed from all unrighteousness. We overcome whenever we receive the body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. It is here that we receive the only thing that can reverse the loss of our life, the life-blood of the one who lives forever! It is here that God reassures us of his love for us and our final destination.

The Bible tells us that as Christian people we are strangers on the earth. In other words, heaven is our real home. It says in the book of Hebrews, "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come." Today you have come to a fork in the road. In fact, every day is a fork in the road for the Christian. To your left there is the path with everything and anything apart from Christ and his holy word. It is fully paved with many pleasures and amusements of many kinds, but at the end of the path there is nothing but the deep abyss of eternal hell. The road to the right leads through the desert of trial and self-denial. It is the path where Christ and his holy word are most important. At the end of that path there is a glorious city, your real home, your heavenly home where your Father is waiting with open arms to give you the crown of life.

The path to the left is the path of unrighteousness and false teaching, while the path to the right is the path of righteousness and truth. Confirmation and everything that follows is one of those moments where Jesus cries out to us: **"Don't Leave Me!"** It is my prayer that you will not leave him but continue in the path of righteousness and truth even though this is never an easy thing to do. There will always be many obstacles in your way. This unbelieving world will entice you to follow its own design. Your sinful flesh will want to do the opposite of what you know is right. The devil who knows your many weaknesses will constantly whisper in your ear to eat and digest his lovely lies instead of righteousness and truth. But in the cross of Christ there is strength to conquer. Paul writes: "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

God has made provision for you as you travel the down the road of temptation and self-denial. He has given you the means of grace. He has given his son Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has created faith within your hearts by the Word and the Sacrament of Baptism. He preserves us by the same as we die to sin and live with him in newness of life every day. And, we receive the body and blood of Christ to reassure us of his constant love. It is here that he says **"Don't Leave Me!"** See to it that you don't leave him, but use the means of grace. Do not lay these aside. Do not set down your Catechism which sets forth

the Word of God in an orderly fashion thinking that now you are finished and know it all. Remember that you have not yet finished running the race, but have just begun, and daily you are at a fork in the road. As it says in Hebrews 12: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

It was Luther - who wrote the Catechism - who once said, "Though I am a learned doctor of theology, yet I have not learned the first page of the Catechism." Do you understand what Luther is saying? Our growth is never fully complete down here. Again Luther: "When you get to the point of imagining that you know the Gospel, the Ten Commandments, and the Word of God outstandingly well, then you are lost, and the devil has won the game . . . Then people usually say: 'Oh, I have heard that for a long time, tell me something different!' When the heart is tired of God's Word in this way, no longer regarding it as its greatest treasure, then the door is open in front and in back, and the devil has free access and may introduce all sorts of errors."

In one sense, today is the day of confirmation. In another sense it is far from being over. We are in a life and death struggle against the attacks of our sinful nature, this unbelieving world, and the devil. They would have us leave Jesus behind. But our Lord says "abide in me, and I in you!" He says, "**Don't Leave Me!**" So what will it be? Will you leave him? My prayer is that you never do. My prayer is that you will reach your final confirmation and be with Jesus forever!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott