

Junior Confirmation
May 6, 2018

"WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH JESUS?"

1 John 5:1-8

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave., Decatur IL 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was born on October 15, 1844. During the baptismal sermon, his father (a Lutheran pastor) asked: "What do you think will come of this little child - good or evil?" And he went on to describe the things that could happen to destroy his son's baptism - his identity in Jesus - the many sins and temptations that a young person might encounter - that which can destroy faith.

At the age of four, after a year of agony, Nietzsche's father died from a debilitating brain disease. The passing of his father marked him for life. Still, the childhood of Nietzsche was infused with the Bible, *Luther's Small Catechism*, and the joy of Lutheran Christianity through his mother. When Nietzsche was just nine years old he heard Handel's Messiah for the first time, and he said "He felt that he had to join in the joyful singing of the angels on whose billows of sound Jesus ascended to heaven."

At the age of 20, Nietzsche arrived in Bonn to study theology at the University, contemplating a future as a Lutheran pastor. But, it was during his time here that he came under the influence of a new method of studying and interpreting the Bible. It scandalously suggested that the Bible wasn't true, and largely nothing but a fairy tale. The combination of questions surrounding God and his father's suffering and death, coupled now with supposedly Christian teachers attacking the truth of the Bible, incited Nietzsche to lose his faith in Jesus, and eventually label himself as "anti-Christ." He did not see Christianity as only a faith he had lost, but as a harmful, damaging, destructive religion that needed to be removed from the earth. For Nietzsche, it was the start of an all-consuming, relentless attack on Christ and Christianity that would lay the groundwork for modern atheism and its hostile hatred of Jesus and all who believe in him. It is sad to say that much evil came from this little child Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche.

I place this true story before all of us as a warning. The formula that Satan used in Nietzsche's life is a common formula he could use for any one of us; especially, for those who are young and still growing up in the Word. Take an unresolved bad event in someone's life, blame God for it and point the finger at God as if he is the enemy who is out to get us (or cause doubt about his existence), then attack the truthfulness of his Word so that we reject it (or cause us to neglect it so that we grow weak and give up on God). He then surrounds us with many friendly non-believers so that we are supported in our unbelief.

Many who have been confirmed in past years often decide after confirmation that there is no longer any reason to sustain and grow in their knowledge and faith in God's Word. They fail to recognize the need of expanding their understanding of Jesus, regardless of the attacks that will be coming their way from this unbelieving world and their sinful flesh, and they grow increasingly weak. Sooner or later, such are tempted to embrace and pursue all kinds of things that they know they should avoid at all cost, but they start changing their way of thinking, and willfully do bad things anyway. It becomes impossible for such to pray and go to church in that state of mind, knowing that what they are thinking and doing is wrong. As they live with the consequences of their pursuit of their sinful thoughts and desires, they begin to perceive Jesus Christ as the real problem in their lives rather than the solution. He becomes the "party pooper," or the one they blame for all the troubles. They adopt a life narrative that no longer sees value in Christ and the future he gives, but they embrace anything and everything but him.

It may not be confirmation day for the majority of us gathered in this sanctuary, but the question posed to the junior confirmation class is always there regardless of our moment in life: **What Will You Do With Jesus?** Who is to say for sure what will happen in the short run. You may very well have many or even all of your dreams come true, but even the realization of dreams down here become meaningless and nothing more than a false sense of pride and self-love when they are accomplished outside of faith in Jesus and his forever love. Apart from Christ, dreams that come true will become nothing more than a glory that is empty and short-lived. As our Lord says in Mark 8:35, "what good is it for us to gain the whole world, and yet lose our souls?" Yes! Instagram, Snapchat, Netflix, the latest song from Drake, American Eagle, Nike, League of Legends, Fortnite (or you name whatever happens to be the latest) will mean nothing on the date and time of your death. The question remains: **What Will You Do With Jesus?**

This down here is insignificant in comparison to our eternity. All will be well if by the undeserved love of God we have known and believed in Jesus. All will be well if we have known and believed in his blood and righteousness. All will be well if by faith we are clinging to his life, suffering, death and resurrection. The only thing that finally gives meaning to life and helps us through today, the only thing that will help us at the sound of the last trumpet or our last breath, is everything that Christ has done for us. This is why we are here. Our Lord and Savior came into this world to rescue us from sin, death, and the power of the devil by becoming sin for us, by tasting death in our stead, by experiencing the hell that we deserve so that we might escape and have eternal life. In him lies our security and hope.

What Will You Do With Jesus? Everyone who has been born of God overcomes. This is the victory that has overcome all that this fallen, sinful world has to offer in the place of him who loved us with an everlasting love - our faith. Who is it that overcomes except the one who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? And Jesus is with us every step of the way until we decide to neglect him and set him off to the side of our lives as if he is unimportant. Jesus says, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

There will come points in your life when you will ask: "where is Jesus?" In those moments, when we question his presence in our lives, we need to understand that the problem is not "where is Jesus?" but "where are we?" In other words, the problem is not with him, but with us as we have forgotten where we are to find him until that day when we see him face to face. In those moments when things are not going well in our lives, there will be the temptation to think that Jesus is our enemy, or that he is not there at all. When we must face constant attacks against the truthfulness of the Word of God in high school, college, society, and in the course of our adult lives from teachers and so-called experts, we are to run to God's Word and wrestle with Jesus for the answers that will help us through. More than that! Let us always be in God's Word so that we are not easily tossed around by the lies of unbelief that would rob us of our identity as Christians through Baptism, and shipwreck our faith.

In our epistle lesson for this morning, the apostle John tells us exactly where we are to find Jesus. He tells us of the way in which Jesus has promised to be with us until the very end. He writes: "This is he who came by water and blood - Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree (1 John 5:6-8)." Later on, in the same section of his first

epistle, he goes on to add these words: “Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (10a, 11-12).”

The Lord has made provision for you as you journey through this thing called life. You have the means of grace. There you find Jesus. The Spirit is with the Bible and is the voice of Jesus who loves you and will help you in every way. The water is your Baptism where Jesus has placed his name on you, called you his own, and bids you to die to sin and rise with him daily. The blood is Holy Communion where he gives you the medicine of forever life and reassures you again and again that he loves you and will fulfill all of his promises to you; even, raising you from the dead and providing a new heaven and earth by which you will have every tear wiped away from your eyes and a forever home of everything good.

See to it that you don't leave Jesus, 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 are currently running through this life down here to go to the home that lasts forever! Do not follow in the footsteps of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, who rejoiced in the day of his confirmation like you, only to allow his sinful flesh, this unbelieving world, and Satan to take everything away from him.

Martin Luther once said: “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.” And this is the heart of my message. I plead with you and pray that you will not stray away from the Word, the identity you have in the death and resurrection of Jesus in your Baptism, and the love of Jesus in his holy Supper. When the sermon is over and the day is done, **What Will You Do With Jesus?**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott