

“Live in Truth and Love”

Today is your Youth Confirmation Sunday. It makes perfect sense on a day like today for us to reflect on and to think about what Confirmation means. So, I have to start off by admitting, in case I haven't before, or in case you didn't catch it, that the word confirmation is not in the Bible. There is no place in the Bible where God commands that we confirm young people, and so of course, no age is suggested for when it should be done. There are also no examples of confirmations in the Bible, that is, no place where we learn that someone was confirmed.

So the question arises somewhat naturally, why do we do it? Why would the two of you spend weeks and months over the last few years in confirmation classes? Why deal with the assignments of worksheets and memory work? Why let Pastor Kassulke have you stand up in front of everyone and talk? That seems like it maybe isn't something you would have chosen to do on your own.

The fact is that we could talk about our confirmation practices and all of the reasons behind them for quite a while, but instead of taking that approach, today we have in front of us a Scripture reading that reminds us exactly why we do so many of the things that we do as far as confirmation instruction. In an epistle, a letter that John wrote to believers, he reminded them of these things. He told them that they were to live in truth and in love. Of course, he was saying to them many of the same things that we heard Jesus say to his disciples earlier. And we can really apply those same words to ourselves, as if John wrote a letter right to you.

Listen to the words of John's letter to you on your confirmation day: 1 John 4:1-11

4 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

⁴ You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

This is God's Word, and it is good for us to consider it carefully. There are two pretty obvious sections to this passage, the part about truth, and the part about love. Probably the one that's easiest to determine its relationship to confirmation class would be truth. I'm sure that if you think over the past few years, you will realize that you've learned quite a bit. You've learned facts about what the Bible says. You've had to repeat those facts on tests and quizzes. The reason we've dug so deeply into the Bible and worked so hard to learn about it is because it is the truth. And as we learn the truth, we can also recognize when that truth is repeated and taught.

And when we can recognize the truth, we can also recognize falsehood, untruths. And that is important because they're out there. Falsehood is easy to come by. In many ways it permeates our culture today.

There are so many examples of widespread and widely held beliefs that clearly contradict what we have learned from the Bible. In recent weeks we discussed some examples, like the theory of evolution which claims that all living things evolved from simpler lifeforms over millions of years, as opposed to God's account of his creating the world in just six days.

But the falsehoods like this aren't limited to science or society. John makes such a strong point about truth because even among so-called Christians and other religious people, we find falsehoods. And they sound good and they seem to be innocent and maybe even loving, which makes them so dangerous. John reminds us in the face of these errors that the truth centers on Jesus Christ, true God in human flesh. He tells us that the most important truth is that Jesus Christ came to suffer and to die to take away our sins. And the fact is all that you have learned in your confirmation classes has been related to and reinforcing that main point of all that Scripture teaches.

John adds, **"We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us."** The way that we, today listen to John and the other apostles is through the Bible that God through them gave to us. All of the lies and falsehoods come from somewhere else, but we are prepared to battle against them when we hold firmly to the truth of God's Word.

But there's more to it than that. Even if we were to know everything there is to know about the Bible, and all of the facts that it contains, it wouldn't matter unless it is also connected to an attitude of love. The Apostle Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians. He says, **"If I...have not love, I am nothing"** (1 Cor. 13:2). It maybe isn't automatically obvious to us how the two major parts of our sermon text connect to each other, but this is at least part of it: that you can't really have one without the other. It is the truth that we hold so dear, that Jesus is our Savior, which also prompts us to love others. In other words, because God loves us, we love others.

That is precisely what John says in these verses. And not only does God motivate our love for others, but he also defines love for us. There are all sorts of ideas about love out there. Some people think that loving someone means letting them do whatever they want, no matter what the consequences might be. That's not love the way God describes it. Some people think that love is all about a romantic sort of feeling toward someone else, but that's not really what God says either. God says that love is found in how we act, when we try to act in a way that serves the best interest of others. Love the way that God defines love means to be more interested in the needs and concerns of others than of ourselves.

That doesn't come naturally. When we're born, we love ourselves. And that's really another way of saying we don't love. By nature we lack love. But in showing love to us, God changed that. Our lack of love deserved punishment, even hell, but Jesus loved us so much that he was more concerned about our well-being than his own. He acted in a way that served us, even though it didn't serve himself. He lived and died for us; he suffered hell in our place. And he made sure that we experienced that love. He poured it over us in Holy Baptism. He repeated his love to us in his Word through Sunday School and Bible Study and Confirmation Class. And there it is again: our Confirmation Classes were all about love because they were opportunities to consider, think about, and celebrate God's love to us.

And God's love for us is life, eternal life. We see again the connection between truth and love. God showed his love to us by sending Jesus, so we dare not obscure that truth or any truth that supports it. To lose that truth is to lose the life that he won for us. And to fail to love others reveals unbelief. John says that you can't love God but fail to love others. If we don't love, we don't know God. God is love.

That is what today is all about, for you and for all who are celebrating with you. Today and going forward, you are ready, ready to keep on growing in faith and knowledge, in love and in truth. That is our prayer and that is the promise you will soon make, that because of God's great love for you, you might keep on living in truth and love.