

“Your Faith and Hope are in God”

Caleb, Lucas, Jon, and Dustin, have I told you recently what is so special about the four of you as a confirmation class? It's interesting that it's a class of all boys, but that happens from time to time. As a class, you've often been ready to answer the questions posed to you, even the difficult ones. Yet, there were times that questions stumped you, too. But one of the things I've thought of that is special about this class is it is the first one I recall that has made a regular habit of not opening up a printed Bible and instead finding references on your smartphone or iPod or some similar device. I'm old enough that this is still a somewhat unusual thing for me. I've known it can be done, and I'm glad that there is a resource that allows you to carry the Bible with you wherever you go, but this is a new thing.

Back in the old days, people didn't have the option. They didn't have smartphones or any other similar devices. They had to read the Bible out of a book. Back in those days, people did something else that is rather rare now: they wrote letters. I'm not talking about emails or text messages. People took the time with a piece of paper or two, a pen or a pencil, and they wrote down their thoughts and greetings. Then they put it into an envelope, put a stamp on it, and sent it on its way.

Now, you may have received letters before. You may have known about them already, but I doubt that you've received many or that you see them often. Today you will probably see many confirmation cards, and some of them might even have a letter included inside. In other words, some people may have taken the time to write out some encouraging words beyond just, “congratulations,” or “good job.”

But before you get to those letters, I have a letter to share with you. More accurately, it is just a small part of a letter, but what makes this letter so special is that it comes to you from God. As you have learned and reviewed over the years, God breathed into chosen writers, like Peter, the words that he wanted written in Scripture. In this brief section from Peter's first epistle, he summarizes for you and for all of us why a day like your confirmation day is so special, and he offers some encouragement for how to live your life.

1 Peter 1:17–21: ¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

When Peter first wrote these words from God, he directed them to Christians who were scattered throughout a section of the Roman Empire. He knew that these Christians were facing difficult times, and he offered them encouragement from a risen Lord Jesus. Just two weeks after Easter, your confirmation day offers you encouragement from that same risen Lord. As Peter says, your faith and hope are in God.

Your faith and your hope are in God because they really can't be anywhere else. In this section, Peter reminds us that God is an impartial judge. He sees and knows your sins. He is aware of every time that you have been lazy or disrespectful, every time you disobeyed your parents, every time you failed to live up to his high standards of perfect love. And even though you may be able to find ways to rationalize and explain away these things, God still says that they are sins. They are offenses to him that deserve his punishment.

But instead of punishing you, God redeemed you. He sent his own Son Jesus as a sacrificial lamb. In the Old Testament, lambs were selected for sacrifice that had no blemish, no injuries or deformities. Such care was taken in selecting these lambs because they represented the Lamb of God, Jesus, who takes away the sin of the world. He was “without blemish or defect.” He lived a perfect life, fulfilling in every moment the holy will of his heavenly Father. And his precious blood was sacrificed for you. How precious it is indeed! It is the very blood of God, perfect and holy, that washes away sin. It has washed away your sin.

From eternity, God had a plan to rescue you from your sin, the plan to send Jesus as your substitute. And part of that plan was to make sure that you heard this precious gospel, this good news message that Jesus died for you and rose again. That gospel was proclaimed in your baptism. It has been taught to you in Sunday School, in your homes, in confirmation class. That gospel is proclaimed to you and your fellow believers every time that the body and precious blood of Christ is offered and received in Holy Communion.

As you sit in front of church today, it would be easy enough for any of us to get the idea that confirmation is all about you: your accomplishments, your learning, your faith. But really, your confirmation is a celebration of God: the faith and the hope that he has worked in you, the rescue from sin that he has graciously given to you, and the love and support that he promises you as you continue to walk with him.

His confirmation letter to you also offers you encouragement in that area. Because of what God has done for you in Jesus, he calls you to live a special kind of life. He calls you to live as an earthly stranger with reverent fear.

Your confirmation has in some ways been a long time in coming. It has taken about 14 years for you to get to this point. And no one knows how many years exactly each of you has ahead of you. But what we do know is this: even if you live to be over 100 years old, that lifetime will be nothing compared to eternity. That’s what it means that you are a stranger here. As important as earthly life is, it is only temporary. In fact, nearly everything that you know is temporary. Those smartphones run out of battery, get dropped, and otherwise fall apart. Your nice new clothes will eventually wear out, or you will grow out of them. Even silver and gold, God’s Word says, are perishable.

But the blood of Christ is so precious because it makes an eternal difference. Your faith is so valuable because through it you have the sure hope of eternal life, just as your Savior has been glorified to live and rule eternally.

So live as strangers here. Don’t get caught up in chasing possessions or money. Don’t get sidetracked by temporary pleasures. Don’t fall into the traps that the world sets in front of you. And over the next several years, you are very likely to experience such traps and temptations more and more. Make it a priority to serve the God who saved you. Make an effort to hear and study his Word regularly. As much as you have already learned, there is so much more to know! Keep around you Christian friends who will support and encourage you. Keep coming to church every week. Come to Holy Communion to receive Christ’s body and blood for forgiveness. Keep paging through the Bible for comfort and encouragement. Or, if you prefer, look it up on your handheld device or whatever future technology provides it to you.

And here’s why: the gospel which reveals Jesus to us as the Lamb of God, our Savior, is the means that he uses to strengthen your faith and to deepen your love. Don’t expect that you are making God love you more or earning his forgiveness by what you do. Live as a stranger here in this world because God has so richly poured out his love on you. Read all of his letters to you to celebrate that your faith and your hope are in God.