

“Jesus Gives You True Peace”

Three years can be a long time. Perhaps as a thirteen year old, you looked forward to being able to drive a car on your own as a licensed driver. But that has to wait at least until you're 16, and it can seem like such a long way away. Or soon you will be high school freshmen. No doubt you will notice in the halls of the school a number of students who seem to have the whole high school thing down pat. They feel like they own the school because they are seniors. And you may look forward to that time when, three years down the road it will be your turn. But doesn't that seem like it's a long way away?

On the other hand, sometimes three years seems like no time at all. I have a feeling that I could ask your parents how quickly the last three years have gone, and they would say that they've flown by. By now, they are probably expecting the same thing of the next three years as well.

Three years was about the time that Jesus and his disciples spent together during his earthly ministry. No doubt in many ways it seemed like a long time. There were so many miracles that they witnessed, more than they could even record in Scripture. There were so many lessons that they were taught. There were so many people that they had opportunity to help and to serve. But at the end of it all, I wonder if the disciples must have wondered how three years could have gone so fast. As Jesus told them about his impending death, they must have felt that they had so many things left to do and so many things left to learn. They must have wondered how it was possible that this ministry that they shared with Jesus had come to an end.

The sermon text today on your Youth Confirmation Sunday records Jesus' words of comfort to his disciples. He spoke these words on Maundy Thursday, the day he was later betrayed to his enemies and arrested. And in spite of the difficult times that they would soon be facing, Jesus promised them his peace. Your Confirmation Sunday is certainly not exactly the same as the situation Jesus and his disciples were facing. At the same time, these two events do share some similarities. For three years you have been involved in confirmation class. You have built on the foundation that you learned in Sunday School and at home, the foundation of the Bible stories and the lessons they teach. You have worked with me, with your parents, and with others to learn more about what God says in his word. You have grown in faith, you have grown closer to Jesus and to each other, and this effort has been a major part of your life. And now this particular phase of your Christian education is coming to an end. Your confirmation class has been preparing you for a future as a communicant member of this congregation, and you are taking that step today. And your confirmation class has been preparing you for a future that you cannot predict, and for an eternal future that lies beyond this life.

And it is fitting that at this time, we take to heart the words of Jesus that he spoke to his disciples, and apply them to your lives. Jesus gives you true peace, and he invites you to rely on that peace.

John 14:23–29 ²³ Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

²⁸ “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

There are certainly many things we might discuss today regarding your confirmation, and many applications that we might make for these words that Jesus spoke. I'd like to focus on two particular

points that help us to understand the peace that Jesus speaks about. This peace, he says, is not an earthly peace, not a peace that the world can give, but the true peace that only comes from him.

The first point is this: that his peace comes from holding to his teachings. That peace is what you have been learning about and studying for these past three years. That peace is the knowledge and belief that your sins are forgiven because of what Jesus did for you. And there's only one place to find that message of peace, and it is in the word of God. Only there do we learn about the perfect life that Jesus lived because we have all failed miserably to live our lives according to God's perfect law. Only in the Bible do we hear that Jesus suffered and died because we deserved death and hell. And only in the Bible do we learn that Jesus rose from the dead, just as he promised he would, so that we could be certain that our sins are done away with.

And Jesus says, "If you love me, you will obey my teaching." He draws a distinction between the unbelieving world that would cast his truth aside, and believers who hold to it as their dearest treasure. And he promised his disciples the Holy Spirit to remind them of these things and to teach them, so that they would understand and treasure this promise. And in the waters of baptism he sent you his Holy Spirit to work faith in your heart to believe that these things are true. As you have grown in faith through the word, you have grown in your commitment to hold on to the truth as Jesus taught it and as his disciples passed it on to others. And as you receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, God will continue to strengthen you to love him wholeheartedly and to hold firmly to his word. Jesus gives you true peace. Hold to his teaching.

And as you hold to his teaching, you have no reason to be afraid. That's the second point I'd like to focus on briefly. It might seem a little strange to you that I would mention this. After all, you are young, intelligent, capable people. You are celebrating a major milestone in your life, and you will be celebrating others in the weeks ahead. Why would you be afraid?

If you take the time to think about it, there are plenty of reasons why you might be afraid. There are dangers all around you. As you drive—I know that comes later, as you ride on the road or walk on the sidewalk, there are vehicles and drivers and situations that could cause you harm. There are diseases and illnesses, some of which continue to trouble even the most brilliant scientists who battle them, and Christians are not immune to them. As you grow and mature, you may well find yourself in difficult situations with friends that may strain your relationships and be difficult to deal with. And anywhere you look you might find temptations that call you away from the teaching that you have learned and present genuine threats to your salvation.

And you are not alone in this predicament. Jesus own disciples faced dangers and diseases, and many were killed at the hands of persecutors who were doing all that they could to stop the message of Christianity.

But Jesus said to them: "Don't be afraid. This is what it means to live in my peace: that even if something tragic happens to you, you are mine. You belong to my heavenly Father who is also your heavenly Father, and even if the trials you suffer should end in your earthly death, the peace I give is the assurance of eternal life."

Jesus told his disciples these things to strengthen them. He told them in advance, so that when they saw him betrayed and suffering and dying, they would know that he had prepared them. When they saw him alive, they would recall his words, and when he ascended into heaven and was hidden from them by the cloud, they could think on his promises and believe that he would come back exactly as he said.

God hasn't told you many things about your future. He hasn't shared with you the details of his plans for you or all the results of the choices that he will allow you to make. But what he has told you is enough. He has told you to hold onto his word because through it he strengthens you to battle temptation. And he has told you not to be afraid, but to trust in him. He has given you his peace, and it is my prayer that you will always live in his peace, in true peace.