

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is ‘*The fruit of the lips*’ and comes from the Old Testament lesson, Isaiah 57. Let us pray . . . Amen.

Today is Confirmation Sunday. A day on which we in this congregation rejoice with these three young men in the gift of faith in God we’ve been given in Baptism. This day has been looked forward to for many years by these confirmands, their parents, grandparents, families, and the congregation as a whole. Today also completes part of the promise made by their baptismal sponsors to lead them to this day and to continue to encourage them in the faithful reception of the Lord’s Supper.

Now Confirmation is not a Sacrament. There is no special blessing attached to it. Instead it is a when these three young men will publically recognize and remember the gifts poured out on them by God in their baptism, and which He continues to pour out on them through the Holy Spirit. This is because Baptism isn’t just something that was done, but it was the moment God made them, like us, His own and forgave us our sins. It is also the place we return daily for the forgiveness of our sins and our life in Christ.

So it is fitting to have Confirmation on Pentecost. The first Pentecost occurred 50 days after the Resurrection of our Lord, and 10 days after Jesus’ ascension. On that day the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem. There they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to proclaim God’s Good News of Christ Jesus and His work for the salvation of the world in various languages.

Often people get distracted by the tongues of fire on the disciples’ heads or their speaking in languages they did not previously speak. But the FOCUS of the reading, the disciples, and the day is on CHRIST and the PROCLAMATION of HIM CRUCIFIED IN OUR PLACE FOR OUR SALVATION mediated through the Holy Spirit. We need to hear this and be reminded of it because we are sinners who desperately need a Saviour. We can also rejoice because God sent His only Son to be our Saviour and to pour out His grace and redeem us. Christ’s grace is a true and not a fictitious grace; because we are true and not a fictitious sinner. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. (adapted from Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, 48:281)

Confirmation is more than just two years of weekly study with the pastor from which now, finally, are over. While the weekly classes may be over, one’s life in Christ is not complete until they take their final breath, or Christ returns in glory. There is no set final exam because, First, Confirmation is not a graduation, and, Second, because as Peter reminds us, “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you”(1 Peter 3:15)

In order to be able to be ready and prepared, one has to continue to study and learn God’s Word—in essence, lifelong catechesis—so we can, through the direction of the Holy Spirit, confidently share the Good News of Christ with those around us.

Going back to Pentecost, it was on that day when the Holy Spirit was given to the Church to create and sustain faith and also produce fruit. The disciples produced fruit of the lips through their proclamation of God’s

Word of grace in Christ Jesus and led many to Christ through repentance and baptism. Peter had a similar proclamation in the Second reading from Acts. Peter proclaimed Christ and the Good news of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the household of Cornelius. He clearly proclaimed the Law and he clearly proclaimed the Gospel. The people of the house heard Peter speak God's Word, they received the Holy Spirit, and they were baptized into the body of Christ—His Church.

Why is this confession necessary? Look back to 1 Peter 3:15: “always be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in you.” This confession recognizes Christ, our Saviour, while also recognizing our own sinful condition. We know that in Sin we were conceived: In sin we were born, in sin we live. We are guilty both of original sin, the sin of Adam, and of every sin we have ever committed. Sin is not figurative or symbolic; it is real and deadly. If sin were only an illusion, you would have no need for Christ or His salvation. There would have been no need for Jesus to come and take on your flesh, carry your sins, or to die in your place on the cross. If sin didn’t matter then you are fine in whatever you do and you don’t need God.

But that is NOT the truth, even though the devil, society and the world, and your own sinful flesh would like you to believe it. The reality is God Hates sin; He hates all and every sin. On your own YOU ARE NOT ALRIGHT. By your own good work and deeds you cannot save yourself, or present yourself as holy and pure in the eyes of God. You cannot be nice enough, nor can you do enough to please God apart from faith in Christ.

The reason is because you, like me, are sinners. The consequence of sin is you separate yourself from God. Each and every sin, each and every time it is committed deserve God’s righteous and full wrath poured out on the one guilty of the sin every single time. There is no such thing as a little sin, or one that doesn’t really matter.

Yet, this is what God, through Isaiah, was proclaiming against the nation of Israel in the Old Testament reading. God just finished telling them how furious He was over the people’s self-righteousness. The people were confident in their sins, in their spiritual harlotry, and they lacked repentance. They had committed adultery and idolatry with all kinds of idols. They had slaughtered and sacrificed their children and thought God, the True and only God would not punish them. They thought their outward acts would save while in their hearts they rejected God. But they were wrong. Dead wrong. God poured out His divine wrath on them. He struck them, He hid Himself from them, and boy was HE angry with them.

I don’t know about you, but when I contemplate God’s wrath and anger being unleashed, it absolutely terrifies me. And then I look out into the world around me I see that nothing has changed in 2700 years, at least not in the spiritual areas.

Too many people are still confident in their sins. Too many people still say that evil is good and good is evil. Too many people are still chasing after every other god while thinking they are alright with the One True God. They too are wrong. Dead, and eternally condemned, wrong. Sin is not a minor matter. It is not child’s play, it is not safe. Despite what the world tried to get you to believe, society does not choose what sin is, nor do individual. God and God alone through His revealed Word, the Bible, clearly and eternally defines what sin is.

And God still hates sin as much today as He did 2700 years ago.

Also, the eternal consequences for sin have NOT changed.

Fortunately God did not, and does not leave us to our own devices. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”(John 3:16-21)

He sent the Holy Spirit into the world where He works through God's Word and Sacraments to bring faith, forgiveness, and eternal life to all who believe. “It is the Holy Spirit Who “has called *us* through the Gospel, enlightened *us* with His gifts, and sanctified and preserved *us* in true faith, just as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all *our* sins, and the sins of all believers, and on the last day He will raise *us* and all the dead and will grant eternal life to *us* and to all who believe in Christ.”(Small Catechism, 3<sup>rd</sup> Article)

These three young men recognize this gift of faith and salvation and will shortly confirm it. In the rite they look back to their baptism and acknowledge the free gifts of faith, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. Also they recognize the continued to work of the Holy Spirit to produce those fruits in them, as He continues to produce them through us.

This is the comfort God also spoke through Isaiah. “I have seen his *sinful* ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners, <sup>19</sup> creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,” says the LORD, “and I will heal him.”(Isaiah 57:18-19) This healing is the gift of forgiveness through Christ. This healing is shared through the fruit of the lips—the proclamation of the Gospel and in the administration, distribution, and receiving of the Sacraments. For it is only through Christ and His works, His forgiveness, that there is peace.

Peace is only received when we are reconciled with God. People will never find true and lasting peace apart from Christ and His salvation as revealed in His Word of Scripture.

And so, as we reflect on the joyous account of this first Pentecost, the beginning of the Christian Church, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness and healing found only in Christ. Let us rejoice in the peace we have with God on account of Christ. Let us repent of our sins, and confidently look to Christ and His victory. Let us keep our eyes on our Saviour and not hinder the fruit of our lips from sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

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