

"Jesus Loves Me, This I Know"

Text: John 17:20-26

May the Risen and *Ascended* Lord live forever in your heart as your closest friend and ally. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, especially this morning our three confirmands:

First a word to you, the parents of these our confirmands. In our society we tend to be quick to find fault and slow to point out the good. Permit a bit of the latter this morning. No one needs to tell you that we live in increasingly challenging times, especially for parents. Our society has less and less time for things like faith and religion. Compounding the problem is the fact that we do not lack for alternatives – there is always something begging for our children's time and attention. The very fact that your children are here this morning, ready, willing, and eager to profess their own personal faith in *their* Savior is ultimately, of course, a testament to the grace of our God. It is also, however, evidence that you, having heard his command to **"bring up your children in the fear and instruction of the Lord"** have done just that. Well done then, good and faithful servants, for the care you have given to these *his* little children.

And now a word to you confirmands: you are no longer little children. On this day, as you make your confirmation vows, you are taking a step from your parents' loving shadow and are assuming a greater share of your own soul-care. The same God who called you to faith will be the one who will preserve that faith in you, but on this day you are assuming a far greater share of the human responsibility that was once borne by your parents alone.

You will also have to pardon your parents if they get a bit emotional, even to the point of shedding a tear or two. No matter how old you grow, in their eyes they will always see you as their babies – their precious memories of you at your birth, during infancy and then toddlers, first day of school, and all the rest – all flashing on the screens of their mind as they see you now. Forgive them that, and know that one day – if God so blesses you will children of your own – you will understand.

One of the songs your parents taught you as little children was "Jesus Loves Me" – in fact it forms our sermon theme for this morning. The fact is that while confirmation does not represent an end to your instruction and growth in the Word and in your faith life, I pray that that simple faith that alone saves will never change. While we continue to learn, and while our understanding needs to grow broader and deeper, the faith that you have

right this very moment does not need to change or mature. May it always be summarized in that simple song you learned long ago: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." What *will* change, mature, and grow, I pray, is the depth of your understanding of just how amazing and profound that simple truth really is.

We turn to our text for this morning for that very thing. The text by which we will be instructed, comforted, and encouraged this morning is found in the 17th Chapter of John's Gospel:

^{ESV} **John 17:20-26** **"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."**

So far the words of our God. Understanding that these are God's holy, inspired Words, and longing to be instructed and uplifted by God the Holy Spirit through them, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

Sometimes the simplest statements mask the profound depth that underlies them. Take that simple song you learned as children: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Rather recently someone pointed out to me something of the depth of those simple words by asking me to list what we have come to know as the Three Pillars of the Reformation. Do you remember what they are? "Grace alone," "Faith alone," and "Scripture alone."

What's remarkable about that? They are all three simply and beautifully represented in the first line of that simple, childhood song. "Jesus loves me" – that's grace alone. "This I know" – that's faith alone. "For the Bible tells me so" – that's Scripture alone. Simple, beautiful, and arguably much more easily grasped. Pure, sweetest gospel.

Yet, as we learned from our own confirmation instruction, God didn't just give us the gospel, did he? He gave us first the law. There was a good reason for that. As with all things in life, we never really appreciate where we are and what we have until we recognize where we were and what we lacked.

Arrayed in their white confirmation robes these young people look so pure and angelic – and that is in fact how God now sees them because of the awful price paid by his Son, and because of the faith that his Holy Spirit has created and sustained in them. But that is not how they were born. Every single human being enters this world already corrupted by sin and unbelief. Children are not born perfect, degraded only by their environment. The Bible tells us: **"that which is born of sinful flesh is sinful flesh."** And again, **"Behold I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin my mother bore me."**

The fact is the gospel itself means nothing to us unless and until we come to terms with our innate, congenital sin-problem. While entertaining for childhood stories, make-believe just doesn't cut it in the spiritual realm. As they came from their human fathers and mothers, these young people – along with all the rest of us – were born as sinful enemies of the One True God. Nor could they do a single thing about it. They couldn't make themselves believe. In fact they didn't even *want* to make things right with their God. They entered this world as God's natural enemies. The Holy Spirit through Paul wrote this to the Colossians (1:21-22): **And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.**

This is where Christian parents first enter their child's spiritual picture: *they bring their children to the water of Holy Baptism*. Saving faith is not a decision; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit alone that can create faith and change hearts, and this he promised to do through that deceptively simple sacrament of Baptism. There the child does not act, he or she is acted upon, and in. The child does not decide, God himself creates saving faith in his heart, working through the water of baptism connected with the power of his Word. There these young people, who were once **"dead in trespasses and sins,"** were brought to spiritual life in one of the most amazing miracles in all of human existence.

Yet while all of this is clearly taught by God in his Word, that's really not where our text for this morning takes us, is it? Our Savior there actually takes a step back from that beginning – into the very realm of eternity –

and there points out a most amazing truth: before you and I were even born, Jesus loved us.

Stop for a moment and try to wrap your minds around that truth. *Before you and I were even born, Jesus not only knew us, he loved us.*

This past week we commemorated an event that typically flies under most radars: Jesus' ascension – his return to his Father's side in heaven. Jesus spoke in our text as looking forward to his ascension as an accomplished fact when he said, **"Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."** Jesus' ascension is worthy of celebration if only for Christ's sake. He got to go home again. In our text he gives us another reason. We get to join him there.

But, again, take a step back from all of that, for our text for this morning, at its core or root, speaks to something even more basic: Jesus not only loves me, he has always loved me – even before he brought me to faith. Even before he gave me my physical life.

The words of our text are part of what we know today as Jesus' High Priestly (sacerdotal) Prayer. It is known as his High Priestly Prayer because, like a priest, he prays not only for himself but also first for his Apostles, and then (in our text) for those who will be brought to faith through the words of his Apostles. **"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."** He is praying, in other words, for you and me. Jesus, praying, *for us*.

He goes on to pray: **The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one.** This is deep, powerful truth – all existing beneath the calm, simple surface of that phrase we routinely take for granted: *"Jesus loves me, this I know."* Before we were even born and therefore obviously long before we were brought to saving faith, Jesus not only loved us, he wanted us to spend eternity with him in heaven. **Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.**

And there's more. Not only did God the Son love us, so did his Father. From our text: **"...So that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."** Do yourself a favor. Read

Scripture Readings

that again and understand just exactly what Jesus is saying. Have you ever doubted that God the Father loved his own Son? Of course not. How could he not love his own Son? Why would he not? God the Father declared his love for his Son openly, and on more than one occasion. Now hear the words of our text one more time, and be amazed: **"...So that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."** You have no doubt that God the Father loved his own Son? Then know that that Son is here telling you and me that that is exactly the same love that God the Father has for us.

The single most amazing part of this simple and yet profound truth is the realization that there was absolutely nothing at all *desirable* about any one of us. Apart from what Jesus has done for us and what the Holy Spirit has given to us, there was absolutely nothing lovable about any of us. And yet we still sing, with faith, *"Jesus loves me, this I know..."* Why? How? *"For the Bible tells me so."*

That's it, isn't it? That's the only answer. We believe that our God loved – and loves – us for no other reason than that he tells us so in his Word. The only thing good in us is what he put there. The only good that God sees in us is the good of someone else that is only *credited* to us. It is the good that his Son earned for us by living a perfect life, and then offering that perfect life on Calvary's cross to pay our sin debt. That is the gospel, the good news – by which we are now saved. I cannot supply the goodness necessary to make myself worthy of God's love or his heaven, but by faith we trust that Jesus supplied my good for me.

This message of God's love has only one source – his Holy Word, our Bibles. That is why every single element of the instruction of our confirmands was drawn from and based upon God's Word. It is why we continue to emphasize that Word of God still today as the only source of power not only to convert but to preserve the faith that alone saves. It is why our confirmands take their vows on the basis of that Word, and why our prayer for them is that they will continue for a lifetime in the diligent, unending immersion in that Word. ***For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*** (*Romans 1:16-17*)

To this Word we commend ourselves and our children – entrusting again this morning, together with them, our eternal souls. There, in that Word, we are taught the simple truth that *Jesus loves me*, and there we are taught just how amazing that simple truth truly is. Amen.

^{ESV} **Acts 1:3-11** He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶ ¶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

^{ESV} **Ephesians 1:15-23** For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

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The Sunday after Ascension/Confirmation – May 8, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 212 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Acts 1:3-11) Our first Scripture reading this morning focuses on the Ascension of our Lord – the event commemorated on Thursday of this past week. Certainly our Lord's Ascension was a great event for our Lord, who finally returned, body and soul, to His Father's side.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 91 (Page 33)

The Second Lesson: (Ephesians 1:15-23) Our second reading tells of the lingering effects of the aftermath of Christ's ascension. All the power and glory that was once his was returned to Jesus when he ascended back to his Father's side in heaven. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is that they might personally experience this power in their lives.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 334 (Red Hymnal) (Alternate Melody)

"Let Me Be Thine Forever"

The Sermon – Text: John 17:20-26 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Jesus Loves Me, This I Know"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Confirmation Hymn – 785 (Brown Hymnal)

"Children of the Heavenly Father"

The Confirmation of Kegan Fettig, Grace Meyer, Neka Watson

Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 755 (Brown Hymnal)

"What Is This Bread"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn 315 (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 212 (Verses 5-7) (Red Hymnal)

"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (45) Average (46)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship meal
Wednesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Mt Zion of Detroit has called seminary graduate Joseph Naumann. Faith of Markesan has called Pastor Matt Hanel. Pastor Luke Bernthal has returned the call to Immanuel of Mankato.

Voters' Meeting Notes – Mr. Mark Redlin was accepted into voting membership. Treasurer Adams reported that offerings are about \$1,000 ahead of budgeted needs, year-to-date. The Council was authorized to purchase assisted hearing devices that will be made available to any who are having trouble hearing during the service.

Thank You! – The congregation extends its warm gratitude to Mr. Barry Hay, both for delivering and setting up the new organ, and for consenting to remain in Bismarck to play the new instrument for the service this morning.

Fellowship Meal – A fellowship meal is planned for after the service this morning in honor of our three Confirmands and their families. Please join us.