

# "The Process"

Text: John 14:1-12

On this the Sunday when we celebrate our Savior's return to heaven, we pray that that same Savior would continue to shower each of us with his grace and peace. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, and especially this morning our Confirmands:

One of the hard, cold facts of life that we may as well get used to is the fact that there will always be more to do. Maybe even worse than that, there is hardly ever anything that we do that we won't have to do again, and virtually nothing that couldn't have been done better – maybe a whole lot better. Nothing we do is ever perfect. Those who build or create things, for example, even when they are done tend to see only the mistakes and imperfections. It's the curse of doing something yourself. Someone else might look at it and see perfection; the builder tends to see mostly only the mistakes. In fact give them a few minutes and they will gladly point out every single one of them to you.

That's just the way it is in this world. True perfection is almost non-existent.

This morning we celebrate two events (confirmation and the Ascension) that prove both parts of that statement: non-existent, and *almost* non-existent.

The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is found in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, the First Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> ***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,*** <sup>16</sup> ***I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,*** <sup>17</sup> ***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,*** <sup>18</sup> ***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,*** <sup>19</sup> ***and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might*** <sup>20</sup> ***that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,*** <sup>21</sup> ***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.*** <sup>22</sup> ***And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,*** <sup>23</sup> ***which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.***

Here ends the very Word of God - of God, not of man. That is why we can with full confidence base all that we think, say, and do – in fact our entire eternal future – upon these words alone. In fact God's Word represents one of the few things in this life that truly is perfect. With such confidence in these holy words, we pray, ***"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth. Amen."***

The term "perfectionist" is deceptive, isn't it? It seems to imply not only the possibility of perfection, but that someone actually achieves it on a regular basis. In reality perfectionists are just those folks who are frustrated more by life than are others. They push themselves harder to get where pretty much no one can go.

Don't get me wrong. I love perfectionists. Their houses are typically immaculate and well ordered, their yards enhance property values, their dishes are spotless, and their handiwork is usually awe-inspiring. Yet perfectionists are usually the first to tell you that they never really achieve perfection; they just tend to get *closer* than the rest of us.

But then there was this one guy...

The first event we celebrate this morning is the Ascension of Jesus, which occurred 40 days after his resurrection from the dead. Since the date of Easter varies from year to year, no one claims to know the actual date of the Ascension. We do know that since Easter is always on a Sunday, and since Ascension is always 40 days after Easter, Ascension always falls on a Thursday. What we also know about the Ascension is that it represents one of the few examples of perfection and completion in this profoundly imperfect and incomplete world – the perfect end to the perfect mission. The ultimate "job well done" once and for all.

And speaking of "a job well done," have you ever plopped down on your favorite chair after a long, hard day and thought that to yourself, *"A job well done!"*? It's interesting to hear how many folks *never* have that feeling. To many, the end of the day just represents a break, a resting period, before "the job" starts again in the morning. Harder still for fallible human beings to look back at the day and think in terms of perfection, even *near* perfection. What on earth is ever really done? What in life doesn't grow back, break down, get dirty again? What has anyone ever done during his entire life that couldn't have been done better?

One thing – the perfection that Jesus Christ came to earth to accomplish, the work he came to do. For human beings, death brings an end to our work, but that end represents an unbroken chain of imperfections. God in his Word tells us that even ***"all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."*** There is really nothing that we do that is just right. That's why it is so hard to comprehend not only the life of Jesus Christ, but exactly what the

Ascension represents. Christ's Ascension was the perfect end to the perfect life. It was Jesus, returning to heaven, knowing that he had completed his work perfectly, sinlessly, flawlessly. Understand that that work was a lifelong process. From the moment he was born he had to fulfill both the positive and negative of every commandment; that is, he had to avoid what the commandments prohibited and he had to carry out (do) everything they commanded. It is one thing, for example, to avoid the act of adultery. It is quite another to be consistently pure in every thought, word, and action. One thing never to kill, another to *"help and be of service to your neighbor in every bodily need."*

That was the process of our salvation. The hardest part, of course, was Good Friday, but the process spanned Jesus' entire lifetime. Jesus returned to heaven at his ascension knowing that he had done all that needed to be done flawlessly – for you and me. What he offered on the cross as our sin payment was nothing less than absolute perfection in every conceivable way. It is just astounding when you stop to think of what Jesus accomplished, on the one hand, and just how ridiculously impossible it would have been for us to supply such perfection for ourselves. And yet that is exactly what we would have had to provide if we were to save ourselves.

Ascension is the day he got to go back to his Father's side in heaven, got to return to the perfect peace, harmony, joy, and contentment that he had before he left heaven to enter this sick, broken world and to here earn our salvation. What a great day for our Lord. His work was not only done, it was done absolutely perfectly. It could not have been done any better. That is exactly why God the Father did for him what he did upon his return to heaven. Our text described it: ***"God the Father... seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."***

So then first on this day we stand in humble awe of what our Lord accomplished, we thank him for it, and we rejoice in the fact that he got to go home – his work on earth accomplished, perfectly.

Yet just as the disciples had to shift their attention back to earth after they had watched their Lord ascend, so we too must now lower our eyes and see that we are still here. We are still trapped in this sin-broken world, still forced to ***"work out our salvation with fear and trembling,"*** knowing that ***"the devil, like a roaring lion, still prowls about, seeking whom he may devour."*** Therefore one of the first things that we need to recognize is that life for the child of God is also a process.

The Apostle Paul recognized this, didn't he? He knew that even after we are brought to faith life will always be a process or progression. We continually strive for perfection, but we never get there on this earth. We just keep pressing on. Paul's words from Philippians 3:12-16: ***"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."***

This brings us to the other event that we celebrate this morning – confirmation. Although it is often tragically misunderstood, confirmation isn't really a goal so much as it is a young person taking ownership of the ongoing process that is life for a child of God living in a sinful world. I know for a fact that our two Confirmands this morning both get this, since both have asked how they could continue their Christian education after they were confirmed. One actually asked me something that no other student has ever asked me – if he could continue coming to confirmation class after he was confirmed.

One of the key truths that these two young men have learned is the universal *imperfection* of humanity. Jesus didn't do what he did because man was good but because man was fatally flawed. Romans 3:9-12: ***All, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup> as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."***

Jesus Christ came to earth to do what man could not do, to offer what man could not produce – perfection. In fact what a terrifying ordeal confirmation would be if the message to be learned by young Christians was how they needed to make themselves worthy and lovable in God's eyes – how they needed to make themselves perfect, knowing that a holy God can accept no less. Rest assured you will hear nothing like that in the Rite of Confirmation this morning. You will be witness to good intentions, but no human being could ever measure up to God's standards, never begin to compare to (or provide) what our *Savior* accomplished.

The good news that we learn from God's Word is not the perfection of man but the perfection of Jesus Christ. It is only because of the perfection of our Savior, credited to sinners by God's grace through faith, that we are saved, rescued, redeemed.

But just here we find one other example of perfection in this world. In fact we see it in every single Christian who has been brought by the Holy Spirit to trust that Jesus Christ provided the full payment for their sins. Every single Christian is, in fact, absolutely perfect in God's eyes.

How could such a thing possibly be true, when everything we do, say or think is ruined by sin? The fact is perfection is ours in the eyes of our God because God equates faith with perfect righteousness. This is the amazing beating heart of the true Christian faith. This is the reason these young man will step forward this morning and declare, by the power of God the Holy Spirit, that they not only believes this to be true, but that they are willing to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from or deny this saving truth.

The incredible message of the Christian faith is that no matter how much sin we see in our lives, God the Father has punished his Son for every last one of those sins. Every last sin. God the Father ***"has laid on his Son the iniquity of us all."*** Therefore when God looks into our hearts and there finds faith in Jesus Christ, he credits Jesus' perfection to us, having placed our sins on Jesus. He looks at us, in other words, as he once looked at his Son, declaring before the world, ***"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*** Now, through faith in that very Son of God, you and I have inherited the perfection, the sinlessness, of Jesus Christ. That means that to all who trust Jesus Christ to have supplied all the goodness necessary to cancel our debt of sin, to every single human being who so believes, God says exactly the same thing that he once declared to his own Son – *"You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."* "Well pleased" not because of any human achievement, but because of the perfection earned by Jesus Christ and credited to every single human being that believes in him.

So also in just a few minutes you will see our Confirmands step forward in their white robes – a symbol not of their own natural goodness but of the perfection, the sinlessness, that has been credited to them through faith in Jesus Christ. Be reminded by this sight. Remember that that is not just how God sees these young men this morning, it is exactly how he sees every single sinner who trusts in him. It is, then, how he sees *you* – perfect, holy, sinless, washed clean by the blood of the Lamb.

Comfort your hearts with this truth as you wait for your Savior, who has gone ahead to prepare heaven for you. In the meantime, carry on the struggle, the process that is the life of the child of God, until that Savior returns to take you home. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 24:44-53** Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." <sup>50</sup> ¶ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple blessing God.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 1:1-11** In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." <sup>6</sup> ¶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, <sup>11</sup> 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."

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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## Transfiguration and Confirmation Sunday – May 28, 2017

**The Opening Hymn** – 738 *(Brown Hymnal)*

"Alleluia, Sing to Jesus"

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

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

**The First Lesson:** (Luke 24:44-53) Our first lesson gives a very basic eye-witness account of one of the events we celebrate on this day – the Ascension of Jesus. Note, however, in this lesson how Jesus focuses not so much on what was going to happen to him as on what was going to happen to his disciples after he left. The gift that he promised to send to them was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the event we know as Pentecost.

**The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 2** (Page 30) *(Brown Hymnal)*

**The Second Lesson:** (Acts 1:1-11) Luke, having given a basic account of Jesus' Ascension in his Gospel, here gives a more detailed account of that event. Again he points to the importance of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Once that gift was given, the understanding of the disciples was dramatically deepened or increased – so much so that from that day forward they no longer thought in base, earthly terms but as their Savior had taught them.

**The Confession of Faith -**

The Nicene Creed – page 5. *(Brown Hymnal)*

**The Pre-Sermon Hymn** – 216 *(Red Hymnal)*

"On Christ's Ascension I Now Build"

**The Sermon** – Text: Ephesians 1:15-23 *(Printed on the back page)*

**"The Process"**

**The Offertory** – (Supplement page 16 insert)

**The Confirmation Hymn** – 400 *(Red Hymnal)*

"Take My Life and Let It Be"

**The Confirmation of Alexander Block and Nathan Jager**

**The Offering followed by the Prayers**

**The Pre-Communion Hymn** – 310 *(Verses 1-3) (Red Hymnal)*

"Thy Table I Approach"

**The Preparation for Holy Communion** *(Brown Hymnal page 17)*

**The Distribution**

**The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving** *(Brown Hymnal page 20)*

**The Benediction**

**The Closing Hymn** – 655 *(Red Hymnal)*

"I Pray Thee Dear Lord Jesus"

**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 (48) Average (47)

**This Week at St. Paul:**

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship meal
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-8:00 a.m.</b>	– WCDC in Valentine
<b>Thursday</b>	<b>-8:00 a.m.</b>	– WCDC in Valentine
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee time

**CLC News** – Redeemer of Cheyenne has called Teacher Quinn Sprengeler to teach in their school. Immanuel of Mankato has called Pastor Roehl to serve as co-pastor. Pastor David Koenig is considering the call to St. Luke's of Lemmon. St. Stephen of Mountain View has called Mrs. Rebecca Lillo to teach in their school.

**Ascension and Confirmation** – This morning we celebrate both the Ascension of our Lord and Confirmation. Congratulations to this year's two confirmands, Alexander Block and Nathan Jager.

**Confirmation Fellowship Meal** – All are encouraged to remain after the service this morning to join us in a fellowship meal in honor of our Confirmands.

**WCDC** – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend the West Central Delegate Conference in Valentine on Wednesday and Thursday of this week.

**Call** – As noted in the CLC News above, Pastor Roehl has been called by Immanuel of Mankato to serve as co-pastor there. Input from the congregation is welcome as Pastor Roehl must now prayerfully consider in which call or area the Lord would have him serve.