

"Simply Amazing"

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 confirmand:

Parents assume a myriad of responsibilities when they have children, one of which is to teach their children good manners. Children don't tend to adopt or acquire good manners naturally. They need to be taught, and then reminded, over and over again. It is also worth noting that teaching good manners goes beyond just saying "please" and "thank you." Good manners are actually just a natural, practical application of the second table of the law, which is God's command to **"love your neighbor as yourself."** In other words, learning good manners means that we learn to see ourselves as others see us, and then to act as we would want others to act. If I don't want someone to floss their teeth in public, I shouldn't do it either. If I don't want someone to randomly check their cell phone in the middle of a serious conversation, I shouldn't do it either. If I don't want to have to listen to someone brag incessantly about himself or herself, I shouldn't either. Everyone gets that.

What might not be self-evident is when and where we need to break the rules of good manners. If, for example, someone were to give you an extremely valuable and unique gift, normal good manners dictates that you not dwell endlessly on what you have and they don't – prattling on endlessly about just how amazing it is, how happy it makes you, and just how lucky you are to have it. Yet just the opposite is actually true when it comes to our Christian faith. Part of being "salt" and "light" is expressing non-stop admiration for the simply amazing gifts our God has given us – gifts like faith, hope, peace, forgiveness, and eternal life.

The difference, of course, is that while it is bad manners to dwell on and brag about what others do not and cannot have, our spiritual gifts can be replicated endlessly. In fact God wants every human being to possess what he's given to each of us. We want the same. How better to make that happen than continually to extol the virtues of our God and to live in obvious awe and admiration of all that he has given to us, and all that he has done for us? Yet how can we communicate just how amazing the Christian faith really is if we ourselves forget, or if we fail to recognize and appreciate? So it is that this morning we will reexamine just a few of the *simply amazing* gifts that our God has given us, and to thereby be reminded.

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.

One of the songs many of our parents taught us as little children was "Jesus Loves Me" – a simple, beautiful Christian hymn. One of the events we celebrate this morning is confirmation. Here's how the two are connected. Confirmation does not represent an end to our instruction and growth in the Word, it is a mile marker along the way. More than that, it is a reminder of the need for continual growth and instruction. Yet the growth does not include the basics of saving faith. In fact God's Word repeatedly tells us that the best faith is a childlike faith – one that trusts without doubt or question. That means that while we continue to learn, and while our understanding needs to grow broader and deeper, the sort of faith that our children possess does not need to change or mature, just their understanding and insight. Go back to the words of that simple song you learned long ago: *"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."* The basic truth of these words does not need to change or grow, but the depth of our understanding of just how amazing and profound that simple truth really is does. In fact sometimes the simplest statements mask the profound depth that underlies them. Though I've known and sung "Jesus Love Me" since I was a little child, it was only rather recently

that someone pointed out to me the amazing depth of those simple words. He did so by first 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. The pure simplicity of the words belies the amazing depth they encompass – communicating in easily grasped words the mystery of God the Father's love for sinful, fallen mankind.

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 the simply amazing facts of where we are and what we have until we recognize where we were and what we lacked. That's what God's law does for us.

Our confirmands wear the traditional white robes at their confirmation as a symbol of how God now sees them: pure and holy 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 profits nothing in the spiritual realm. As we come from our human fathers and mothers, all of us were born as sinful enemies of the One True God. Nor could any of us do a single thing about it. We couldn't make ourselves believe. In fact we didn't even *want* to make things right with our God. We 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 the gift and work 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, and yet utterly amazing sacrament of Baptism. There the child does not act; he or she is acted upon. 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. That any of us, who were once "***dead in trespasses and sins,***" were brought to spiritual life at all is 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 often goes unnoticed and unappreciated: 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*. Simply amazing.

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 simply amazing truth here. 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. Think about that until you 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 is exactly the same love that God the Father has for you.

One of the most amazing aspects 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 and conviction, "*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 us – and still today 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 what we have been given. 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. What we could never do for ourselves, Jesus did for us.

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 is 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. As Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: ***For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...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 to the care of our God, and our lives to his service. There, in that Word, we are taught the simply amazing truths that are offered nowhere else in all of creation. God preserve in each of us these simple, divine, amazing words of life eternal. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{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.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

Ascension and Confirmation Sunday – June 2, 2019

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 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. We are also here reminded of our calling to serve as his witnesses, until he returns.

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 (and for us) 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)

"Let Me Be Thine Forever"

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

"Simply Amazing"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Confirmation Hymn – 785 (Brown Hymnal)

"Children of the Heavenly Father"

The Confirmation of Colin Fettig

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 755 (Brown Hymnal)

"What Is This Bread"

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 – 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 Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone 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 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, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (28) Average (34)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship Meal
Friday	-6:00 p.m.	– June Time Out
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour

CLC News – St. John's of Okabena has called Teacher Graduate June Schmid. Holy Trinity of West Columbia has called Teacher Paul Tiefel. Teacher David Bernthal has returned the call to Faith of Markesan, and has asked for release from his current call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac.

Daily Rest – The next volume of Daily Rest has arrived. If you subscribed, you should find your copy in your mailbox. They also sent two extra copies, which are free for anyone to take. Please help yourself.

Confirmation Sunday – Today is Confirmation Sunday at St Paul. Our Confirmand this year is Colin Fettig. Holy Communion will be celebrated and a fellowship meal is planned for after the service.

The Lutheran Spokesman – Subscriptions are due for the Lutheran Spokesman. You will find a sign-up sheet on the mailbox table. If you already subscribe, you only need to indicate if you want to renew or cancel your existing subscription. New subscribers fill out the second sheet. Payment can be placed in the offering box, and does not need to be labeled.

Looking Ahead – This year's **Vacation Bible School** has been scheduled for August 5-9. Sessions will run from 6:30-8:30 each day. Our **Annual Church Picnic** has been scheduled for the following Sunday, August 11th. The site is Hillside Lion's Park, Shelter #1.