

Pastor Chris Matthis
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Proper 14, Series A (Pentecost 10)
Saturday, August 8th, 2020
Sunday, August 9th, 2020 (Confirmation)

Sermon: “I Do by the Grace of God”

Text: Romans 10:5-17

Focus: God gives us faith in Christ by hearing his Word.

Function: That they would never let go of their confession of faith in Christ.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel...” (SC, 3rd Article of Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Amen. Something deathly serious is about to happen today (or *tomorrow*) in our congregation.

Six young people are going to stand up before the church, their family, and *God*—and they will give public confession of faith in Jesus Christ, their Savior and Lord. As at their baptisms, they will renounce the devil, his works, and all his ways. They will assert “Yes, I believe” to each of the three articles of the Apostles’ Creed, thereby confessing faith in the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They will profess the Bible to be the true Word of God, and the Small Catechism to be a true explanation of the Bible. And finally, they will answer these two questions: “Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, *even to death*?” and “Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, *even death*, rather than fall away from it?”¹ In other words, our confirmands will indicate whether or not they are willing to *die* for the name of Jesus and for the sake of confessing their faith in him. Now that is rather sobering on a

¹ The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 273.

Sunday morning (or Saturday night), don't you think? That's worthy of pause to consider before you answer, wouldn't you agree?

In our epistle lesson today, the Apostle Paul writes: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved" (Rom. 10:9-10, ESV).² Confirmation Day is about confessing your faith. And faith is about believing and trusting Jesus Christ, the one who died and lives for you, the one who rescues you from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Christianity is all about life and death: Christ's death and yours, and your life in Christ. Confession is all a matter of life and death. And today you must decide whether to live by faith or die in sin and unbelief. If you want to be Jesus' disciple, you must take up your cross daily and follow him—even to the grave (Luke 9:23). "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Paul's words in Romans 10 are powerful and inspiring, but at first glance they also seem to imply that we must *do something* in order to be saved: "confess with your mouth," "believe in your heart." *Do this*, and you will be saved. Doesn't this sound somewhat like what our non-denominational and Baptist brothers and sisters insist: they we need to *ask* Jesus into our hearts, *say* the sinner's prayer, or *invite* him to be Lord and Savior of our life in order to be saved? If we don't *say* something, are we saved? If we don't make public confession in church, or bear witness through personal evangelism to unbelievers, will we be saved? Is this the bargain: Jesus died for my sins, but until I talk about it, I'm still lost? What if I'm quiet and shy and don't know how to start a spiritual conversation with a stranger? Will I go to hell?

² All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

No, not at all! Verse 10 helps us understand verse 9. “For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” (Rom. 10:10). Justification is something God does *to* us—not something we do to ourselves or for God. Justification is forensic language—courtroom talk. Justification is a legal decree, a pronouncement of innocence. Justification is God declaring you not guilty for your sins because of the blood of Jesus. God justifies, not you. You are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone—apart from works of the law.

You cannot do anything to save yourself. Christ *already* did it all when he died on the cross to forgive your sins and rose again from the dead to give you eternal life. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Grace and faith are gifts. *God* gives you faith in Christ when you are baptized and hear the Good News of the cross (cf. Rom. 10:17).

God justifies. Christ saves. The Holy Spirit puts faith in your heart. God does it all!

And the joyful, heartfelt response to Christ saving you is to confess with your mouth what God has already put into your heart believe. The confession doesn’t save you. Christ saves you. But we confess because we are saved. It’s a matter of not putting the cart before the horse.

Just as you might write a “thank you” note to somebody who gives you a gift on your birthday or at Christmas, so also, we confess Christ. You don’t write a thank you note *in order to* get the gift. You say thanks because you *already* received one! We give thanks and praise to God for saving us. We call on his name in prayer. We are eager to tell others what God has done for us. And when we see somebody else in need of hope and life, we share the gift of Jesus with them out of our great joy.

And Confession is kept best in community. Notice how much I've used the word "we" instead of "I" or "you" today. In fact, the Greek word for "confess" is *homologein*, which means to "say the same thing." And our English word "confirmation" comes from the Latin *confirmare*, which means to "make stronger *together*." We confess together. We confirm our faith together. Our faith gets stronger as we gather together around God's Word and Sacraments. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). You can never get enough of God's Word. You can never get enough Jesus. God always has more blessing for you, more gifts, more forgiveness. God isn't done with you. Confirmation is *not* graduation. It's another beginning, not an ending.

We must confess *together*. "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (Heb. 4:14). "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23). Jesus promises to be present wherever two or three gather together in his name (Matt. 18:20). The Christian life is not just about me and Jesus, Jesus and me.

The Christian life is difficult. On your own, you are more likely to succumb to the devil's attacks: temptation, persecution, doubt, and despair. They say, "If you want to go fast, travel alone; but if you want to go far, travel together." You need to travel far: all the way to the end. We need each other. You need others. We need *you* for the journey. And you need us. "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25, NIV). Don't stop going to church and hearing God's Word of Law and Gospel, command and promise. Never go it alone. The Church isn't done with you, and you're not done with the Church.

And so we come back to those two deadly-serious questions: “Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, *even to death?*” and “Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, *even death*, rather than fall away from it?”³

And if you believe in Jesus, you must say: “I do, by the grace of God.”

That’s it! That’s the answer to the question of whether or not you are willing to die for Christ who died for you: “I do, by the grace of God.” *Only* by the grace of God can we believe in his Word. *Only* by the grace of God can we call on his name. *Only* by the grace of God can we confess Christ before the world. And *only* by the grace of God will we contend for and keep the faith. It is not you who does it, but Christ *in you* who does it. Jesus does it all—pure grace. “I do, by the grace of God.” In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.

³ *LSB*, 273.