

Sermon 2010 Palm Sunday
Text: Philippians 2:5-11
Theme: "Confirmed for Suffering"

It is confirmation weekend at Trinity and this weekend is a good weekend to think about exactly what confirmation is and is not. Often in the Church, we have thought of confirmation as an entrance requirement. First you master the information found in the Small Catechism and then you may enter the adult life of the congregation and receive the Lord's Supper. That is not what confirmation is. If it is, 99% of you are in big trouble. What if I ask you to recite the meaning of the 9th Commandment before I will commune you? Or what if you have to explain Luther's understanding of millennialism before you can vote at a congregational meeting?

Confirmation is a watershed in after we have spent an agreed upon amount of time, in this congregation approximately 100 hours of instruction, educating our young teenagers. Having educated them in the basic doctrines of the Church we confirm them, but what does that mean? When they were Baptized, we made promises for them. We promised that they would learn

God's word and thus his will for their lives. We promised that they would renounce Satan and all his works and all his ways and one day join us in the battle against him. What we really promised is that they would claim the power of their Baptisms. They would claim the faith that was given to them and use it for God's glory.

Now our confirmands come before us as young men and young women understanding more about the power that they have been given in Baptism and knowing better how to claim that power for themselves. So we confirm them. The Church declares that they desire to continue in the faith and I lay hands upon them as your representative, imparting the very power of Christ himself, and send them forth into the world. But what does this really mean?

This is not a hero's parade. Aside from the presents and cake that we have built into Confirmation Day, it is a joyful day but a bit of a grim day as well. We are sending young soldiers into battle. They are equipped to fight the fight of faith but some of them will fall – we know that. They are leaving the protections

of childhood and venturing into dangerous waters where Satan will attack them on every front. They will be tempted beyond their individual abilities to withstand temptation. They will be assailed by the evil angels in an attempt to draw them away from the foot of the cross.

Paul says to his flock in Philippi:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,” Then he goes on to describe what Jesus did for us on the cross. One could easily walk away from this and think that all one has to do is imitate Jesus. In fact I have heard sermons to that effect. But what does that mean? First off we already know that we are miserable failures at imitating Jesus and if we carried it out completely, we would all need to die from crucifixion.

That sentence that begins our text this morning, and every Palm Sunday, is preceded by this from Paul:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry

or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

Confirmation does not cut us loose to go off on our own and try out faith. Confirmation sews us into the fabric of the Church and makes us part of something that is bigger than all of us. Confirmation sends us into battle but not as lone rangers but as part of an army led by the heavenly host and King Jesus himself, but this time he's not riding a lowly donkey but a white steed and wielding a flaming, double edged sword. Paul is welcoming the Philippians into the ranks.

His call to all of us [and to you especially Daniel, Rudy, Glen, Adam, Josh, Arthur and Erin] is to lean on one another, to trust one another as we move forward in battle against evil. The battle genius of the Spartans was their ability to close ranks, raise their shields over their heads, overlapping them with their neighbor's shield and thus shield their fellow soldiers from the arrows of the enemy archers. They moved as one body and they conquered.

So too, the Church confirms new soldiers of the cross to stand in our ranks, taking the place of the fallen. We move as one body because we have the same mind – the mind of Christ Jesus who suffered and died to become our Savior and our King. We do not wander aimlessly but he leads us through this world where there will be suffering. Don't be naive. A soldier does not enter battle without the certainty that the days will be difficult and may even lead to his or her death. He knows that there will be suffering. Today you are soldiers confirmed for suffering.

But unlike a soldier in an earthly battle, who never knows for sure who will win, we fight a battle which has already been won and has only to be finished. King Jesus has destroyed the gates of Hell and they shall not prevail against his Church. There will be suffering along the way but at the end... there... will... be... Resurrection! We know that because King Jesus entered Jerusalem on this day. On Thursday we will sit with him again for his Last Supper and we will see him elevate bread and wine to be his body and blood for our nourishment in battle. On Friday we will stand again in sorrow and horror as we see our King

abandoned on the cross and sent to Hell in our place. But next Sunday, we will rejoice because he rose from the dead thus insuring resurrection for all who follow him.

Close ranks people of God; shields up and forward into the darkness shining our King's light that blinds and destroys the demons from Hell. We are confirmed for suffering but make no mistake. We are also confirmed for resurrection. Amen.