**Hebrews 11:1; Joshua 1:9; Revelation 3:11** June 7, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Confirmation Sunday

*Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

“Why did you do it?” asks his mother. “I don’t know” says the nine-year-old with a helpless shrug. Mom tries a different approach: “What were you thinking?” “I don’t know.” He really doesn’t know. It was just an absent-minded “I wonder what would happen if….” and then things started to unraveled.

If there is one thing that God does not want you to answer when someone asks you what it means to be a Christian, God doesn’t want you to shrug your shoulders and say, “I don’t know.” Before going to the cross Jesus spent three years on earth so he could teach. He sent out his disciples into all the world to baptize people, and *“to teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.”* And it is not just for adults. God said, *“Impress [these commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up”* (Dt 6:7).

We don’t “just believe.” We don’t have faith in faith. Christians believe something. Faith has a content. Faith is not a balloon that as you blow it up it becomes more see-throughy, and it becomes all the more obvious that there is nothing inside but hot air. That’s not faith. It may be optimism, but it is not faith. Faith. The Christian faith is, well—if on the one side you have a big empty balloon, faith is more like a piñata. It is chock full of all good stuff. The Christian faith believes something, and not just anything you want to believe. God has made clear what he wants us to believe what his Word says, and it is good stuff!

Thankfully, the basics of our faith are simple enough that a two-year-old can understand the most basic thing: Jesus is my Savior from the bad things I have done. But what we believe in is not a bunch of simple children’s bedtime stories. As we grow, the *what* of faith continues to deepen and broaden. While we may not know all the answers, we know that there are answers and reasons. They are explained in God’s Word. The *what* of faith explains the big knotty problems of this world. It explains why there is evil in this world. It explains how we are part of that problem and how we are forgiven and redeemed to live a new life. It explains the internal struggle believers live. God’s Word explains how we should live in this world, with true love and concern for our fellow man. It teaches us to keep our eyes heavenward, waiting for the day when Christ comes again and we will be given the goal of our faith.

The Christian faith is not just a maybe, or an “I hope so,” or a shrug of the shoulders; it is a certainty. The Christian faith gives answers and guides life, most of all by centering on the life and death of Jesus Christ.

When you looked out the catechism classroom window on those Sunday mornings at the blue sky and green grass and wondered why you were there… that’s why we were there. We were there learning from God’s word so that this passage which you have chosen as your confirmation passage, Ema, may be true of you:

***“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*** Amen.

*Joshua 1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”*

I don’t know if you confirmands have done classroom presentations yet – I know I didn’t have to until sophomore year of high school. If you haven’t, you soon will. You will soon find out that when you have a presentation, there are certain people you don’t want to follow. Sure, you can do presentations well enough, but there will be that one person who is so smart, so persuasive that if you have to follow them, you just know you are going to look like an idiot. You’re not an idiot! But when you make your science presentation right after Albert Einstein, Jr.…

That’s just where our reading is. Moses had just died. Moses. The guy who walked up into the dark cloud on Mt. Sinai and talked with the Big Man. Moses who came down with stone tablets still glowing where God’s finger had etched the Ten Commandments into stone. Moses, who stretched out his hand and the seas parted. (Of course, Moses would be the first to point out that God is the one who did it. But still…) Moses, who at age 120 *“his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone”* (Dt 34:7), and then he climbed another mountain, died, and it says that God himself buried him. That Moses.

Now what? Better question: now who? Joshua. Joshua is going to follow Moses as Israel’s leader. Who wouldn’t be intimidated and worried? Sure, Moses’ time is past. Israel is marching on, quite literally, into new lands and new times. But everyone will remember Moses. So God came to Joshua and said, ***“Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged.”*** This is your Bible passage, Abby.

You have heard words just like this hundreds, if not thousands, of times. Just before the soccer game, the coach shouts this sort of stuff at you and your teammates to get you revved up: “Be strong. Be brave. You can beat these guys. You are better than them. You can play smarter than them. You own them!” And you run out on the field. But no matter how good you are, sooner or later, you are going to come up against a team that *is* just plain better than you, smarter than you, and if you played them a hundred times you wouldn’t beat them once. A good coach’s talk can only accomplish so much.

When God spoke these words to Joshua, he said something completely different from what your coaches have said. Joshua’s confidence wasn’t to be built on Joshua’s smarts or talent. It was this: ***“Have I not commanded you?”*** You confirmands have reason to be strong and courageous in living your faith—because it isn’t something your dad or mom or pastor told you to do, but because God commanded you, ***“Have I not commanded you?”*** But there is more. He says, ***“The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”*** This is every Christian’s confidence. Christians are not exempt from the challenges of life in this sinful world. We know the fear and discouragement of the times we live in. No matter where you go, where you end up, what questions you have, God is with you.

***“Be strong and courageous”*** the Lord has commanded you; the Lord is with you.

*Rev 3:11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

I don’t like it when people exaggerate to make things seem worse than they really are. Every four years, the influencers on both sides of the political aisle say, “This is the most important election ever!” Really? You have said that every single election in my living memory! And I don’t like it when people complain about little things all the time, and then get upset when you don’t take them seriously about big things. They were the ones who cried wolf.

I say that to underline that thought goes into my saying this: I believe that, right now, in mid-2020, we are living through the most challenging time we as a nation have had in the past 45 years. World War II was about something much bigger. The Great Depression caused much more suffering than we are likely to suffer in our current events. The Vietnam War Era turmoil was significantly worse than ours at this moment. But for anyone under 50 years of age, I believe that this is the most challenging year we have lived through.

*And*, *never* in the past half century have we Christians better relished the words Jesus said, which you, Natalie, have chosen as your confirmation passage. ***“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”***

Let me read the first words again. Feel Jesus’ words warm your heart. ***“I am coming soon.”*** “Yes, Jesus,” we pray, “today would be a good day for you to come back!” The very thought brings a smile to our believing hearts, a smile that we aren’t feeling so often these days.

Even as the first words bring an obvious joy—and Jesus wants it to put joy in our hearts—there is a hidden joy: ***“Hold on to what you have.”*** On this earth we are surrounded by danger. Yet Jesus doesn’t tell us to *hope* we will maybe receive the prize if only we will overcome. He has already given us the crown. By dying for our sins, he won it. Through Spirit-implanted faith in Jesus, it is credited to us. He tells us, ***“Hold on to*** what you already have,” he said!

Finally, the word of caution in this verse: ***“So that no one will take your crown.”*** Jesus warns us not against physical danger presented by disease, riot or abuse of power. This danger is much worse than anything the news is covering. It is the threat of being robbed of eternal life. Imagine that! Imagine coming before Christ in the Great Judgment and it being found that you had shipwrecked your faith because you had followed the friends that led you away from Christ, that you had feared and given in before those who mocked your faith, that you had simply checked out of faith because you treasured wealth and entertainment above life with Christ. How terrible it would be for Jesus to come, and for you to have discarded the prize somewhere back there on the path of life. That would be a day of heart-rending regret worse than anything anyone has felt in the last 50, 100, or 5,000 years. ***“Hold on to what you have.”***

Treasure the faith you have been given by God. Grow in knowledge of him that you may be firmly rooted in Christ. And be joyful every time you hear Jesus’ promise, ***“I am coming soon!”*** Amen.