**Revelation 2:10b (Confirmation: Jacob Martin)** June 2, 2019

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*Revelation 2:10b Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

A lot of not good things happen in extended stay hotels. Much of what happens is sordid. A lot more is just plain sad. Then there is the illegal. And even if it is none of these, almost all of it is stamped somewhere with loneliness. But something wonderful happened to you, Jacob, in an extended stay hotel. There, in the presence of five people, God saved you. You had been born, like the rest of us—every single one of us—in sin, with the stench of sin and death in every sinew of your body. But there in that hotel, through Holy Baptism, Christ Jesus wrenched you out of Satan’s hands and claimed you as his own—just as he did today in this church with Lillian and Athena. It isn’t *where* you are baptized, it’s that you *are* baptized.

How heaven rejoices in that truth! And I don’t just mean the angels. There is a passage hidden away in one of the Old Testament prophets. This beautiful passage describes God doing something we just don’t think God would ever do, but it says it right there in Zephaniah: *“The Lord your God will rejoice over you with singing”* (Zephaniah 3:17) God rejoices over his people with singing! If God rejoices over his people with singing? Is it not right for us to rejoice with Lillian’s and Athena’s parents today, just as your parents once did in that extended stay hotel?!

That was the most important moment of your life.

But that wasn’t the end. It was the beginning. Over the years you have been on a journey, worshiping in churches, taking part in Sunday School classes, home devotions, and now in the last three years a weekly confirmation class taught by Mr. Grace and myself. Hopefully you sense a general direction in your life, toward God, with God.

Speaking of directions, do you know what most people use for directions these days? Yep, GPS’es. Did you know that they even have GPS’es in farm tractors these days? Now that’s strange! I mean, how lost can you get sitting ten feet off the ground in a corn field you have farmed since you were knee-high to a grasshopper? I’m going to let you in on something. Those GPS’es aren’t to keep farmers from getting lost in their own cornfields. One of the purposes they serve is to plant arrow-straight rows of crops. It wasn’t always that way. Back before there were air-conditioned tractor cabs, or even shade canopies, farmers had to wrestle their almost toy sized tractors without power steering over newly plowed land. They say it was actually quite difficult to plant a straight line. Back in the day up in northern Iowa, you, Jacob, had a great uncle up renowned for having the some of the straightest crop lines around. You never met Uncle Milton, but when asked how he did it, he said, “I start at one end of the field, pick out something all the way down on the other end like a fence post or a bush and I never take my eyes off it. Never look at where you are; always look at where you are going.” Keep your eyes on the goal.

***“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*** Keep your eyes on the goal, that crown of life. Jesus said that to some people who were looking around at their life and they were wondering. They had some tough going in Revelation chapter two. Of course, when we first heard about it, we laughed.

You were trying to pick out your confirmation verse and we were sitting at the supper table and you asked me about a good confirmation verse. I said, try Revelation chapter 2 verse 10. And so you opened the Bible to Revelation 2:10 and you started reading. You read, *“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.”* We all kind of looked at each other and then started laughing. “That not a confirmation verse!” But that *is* Revelation 2:10. That is the first half of the verse. As you well know, your confirmation verse is actually only the second half of verse 10. The first half is *“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.”*

While we laughed, it is no laughing matter.

That Bible verse was spoken to people who really would be put in prison for their faith. Jesus said to them, “Be faithful to the point of death.” That Bible verse was written to people who on the walk to get their groceries would hear the neighbors muttering, just loud enough to hear, “There goes another one of those blankety-blank Christians.” “Faithful unto death.” That was spoken to people who just might feel the pointy end of a Roman short sword through their tunic to the words of “Deny Jesus or die.” “Faithful unto death.”

***“Be faithful”*** isn’t about doing the right thing. It is about simply having faith. “Be full of faith.” And you have that faith. It was given in Baptism. It was nourished in the hundreds of church services you have been to, the hundreds more of Sunday School classes, the dozens of catechism classes. Let us not forget the thousands of devotions at home. You have been fed and raised on the word of God so that your faith is not some feeble starving faith that shrinks back when exposed to direct sunlight. Your faith has been strengthened again and again by God’s Word *“so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”* (Ephesians 6:13). Now those are words worthy of a Christian.

And no longer are we laughing at the words of, *“the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecutions…”* Those words make us set our teeth, tense our muscles, and pray, “God help me. I *want* to be faithful to the point of death!” We realize that it just might be, (I pray it is not so, son), but it just might be that God has been feeding your faith through these years for such a time. ***“Be faithful, even to the point of death”*** is not just a slogan, a hyperbole, an inspirational thought to be framed and hung in the board room. Think about the over 200 Christians murdered 43 days ago, just for being Christians celebrating Easter. ***“Be faithful, even to the point of death.”*** Remember that eleven of Jesus’ Twelve suffered untimely deaths. Know that it is illegal to display a cross in over 40 nations of this world.

In Baptism Christ claimed you as his. In Confirmation you say, “And now I pledge myself to Christ and all I have learned about him and his way of salvation, God help me.” This is a serious thing you are saying.

By God’s grace, you are committing your life to the core truths that you are a sinful human being, incapable of saving yourself, of doing anything toward saving yourself. But you know that Christ Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, became human. In doing so he kept God’s law in our place, and he paid the penalty of our sin in his death. And just as Christ rose from his own deathbed, you too will one day be taken with him into the clouds as Christ himself ascended. Today you are saying that you would stake your life on those facts.

And Christ Jesus says, “Yes, Jacob, stake your life on these facts, because ***I will give you the crown of life.”*** Just like Uncle Milton said, “Always keep your eyes on where you are going.” Jesus has promised you that there will be an end to the struggles of this world. There will be an end to the temptations. There will be an end to the doubts that Satan plants in our hearts. Then, you will be with him forever.

You can stake your life on it. Amen.