

2 Timothy 3:14 As for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

CONTINUE (A CONFIRMATION SERMON)

Dear Friends in Our Savior, Jesus Christ,

A. Fourteen Years into the Journey

Where were you in 2001 and 2002? At what point in life? Keera & Jamie, Louise & Sean, Renae & Brian, (I put the mothers first. They did have most of the work in bringing these three blessings into the world), back in 2001 and 2002 you were expecting these three gifts from God who sit before us this morning.

For all six of you parents, from the moment you knew you were expecting, your life has been full of choices for these three. It started with, “When should we tell everyone?” Do we want to know if the baby is a boy or girl, or wait for the birth? And then there was the whole name thing – girl’s name, boy’s name. Decorating the baby’s room, buying the baby clothes. Big decisions, little decisions.

After fourteen years, if you made ten decisions for your child every day, that would be 50,000 decisions, more or less. You parents have made many many choices over the years for Nolan, Abby, Cody.

And you, Nolan, Abby and Cody are starting to think, “I thought this day was my confirmation...” You are not being selfish. You are just wondering, “Is confirmation about me or my parents?” Good question.

Confirmation is the moment where we take a pause. Like when you are climbing a big hill, and you get tired so you take a rest. And you stand there and your eyes look up the hill and you guess how long it will be to get to the top, and you know it will be worth it when you stand up there and can look out over the miles. And then you turn and you look down the hill and realize that you have covered more ground than you thought.

I think that happened last week. In Examination Sunday I asked you dozens of questions about your faith. I asked you how you are saved and what God’s will is for your life. You answered those many questions, and the people of this congregation were so happy to hear it, and they were impressed too. And a few of them maybe even thought when they heard one or two of those questions, “Ooh, glad pastor didn’t ask me that one.” Yes, by God’s grace, through his word, you have grown in your walk of faith. And today, seeing that, we receive you as confirmed members of this church.

We stand on the hillside. Thankful that God has carried you this far.

B. Confirmation Is Not Graduation

Have you ever tried putting your sleeping bag down on a hillside? I remember doing that once while out hiking in a wilderness area. On the mountain tops it was cold and windy, in the valley there were all kinds of mosquitos, so I put my sleeping bag down on the mountain side. Slept terribly. In the morning I thought someone had stolen my backpack or something, because I couldn’t see it anywhere. Well, that’s because me and my sleeping bag, every time I turned in the night in my fitful sleep, we slid down the mountain. Eventually I looked several yards up the hillside and there was my backpack and

gear, right where I had left it. Hillsides are okay places to rest, but not to stay.

And so on this day when we pause and thank God for your faith, I say what the Apostle Paul said to his friend in Christ, ***“Continue.” “Continue.”***

But what about Paul’s friend? This small book of the Bible, Second Timothy, is the last book that Paul wrote. He died shortly after this. He knew he was going to die. By the Holy Spirit’s prompting, Paul wrote this letter to his friend Timothy. Timothy was the son Paul never had. Fifteen years before this, Paul, on one of his journeys, met Timothy. He got to know Timothy’s family. Young man Timothy from the town of Lystra, became Paul’s closest traveling companion. They travelled together for years, preaching the Gospel of Jesus. Sometimes Paul dispatched young Timothy on special missions. After 15 years, nearing death, Paul writes to not-so-young Timothy with these words: ***“To Timothy, my dear son... Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of.”*** Paul was almost at the top of the mountain, at the end of his spiritual trek. Timothy was not yet. ***“[Timothy,] continue.”***

And so here at confirmation, you only stop to admire the view and catch your breath. We have a goal, but it is still farther up.

Some people look at confirmation like graduation. What happens at graduation? You complete school. When you graduate from elementary, middle, or high school, you stop going to that school. Once you graduate you might never enter that school building again.

Some people look at confirmation that way. They think that confirmation is the end of the hike, the top of the mountain, the end of their spiritual training. That is a worrying thing.

Listen, back in grade school, I had a best friend. From my bedroom window I could look across the small river that went through town, and I could see his house. One summer we went back and forth to each other’s house for 14 days straight. We both had paper routes in 7th and 8th grades. We went to the Lutheran school together. Being a small school, we always shared the same classroom, the same lunch hour—every day for nine years. On April 15, 1984, we were confirmed together. On that day we pledged to be faithful to Jesus, our Savior, forever, just like you will in a few minutes. Once that school year ended, I never saw my best friend in church again. A year and a half later our family moved away. It still bothers me. My friend, is he a Christian now? I don’t know. Maybe I should look him up. I really should. His eternity might hang in the balance.

Will you, Nolan, Abby and Cody, will you still be coming to worship and listening to your Savior a year from now, five years from now? I pray so. I pray so. ***“Continue in what you have learned.”***

C. Your Confirmation Faith Is Worked by God

If it really came down to that, that we must prove faithful to God, that would create a lot of stress in any Christian who takes faith seriously. Really, it is not on you or me or your parents that your faithfulness depends. ***“From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed.”*** God’s Holy Spirit speaks through his word. In these words, read every Sunday, and at many other times in your lives, the Holy Spirit portrayed the big problem that you and I and everyone else have. We have the problem of sin.

We daily and often fall short of what God wants and requires. We do not love. We get in arguments, we talk mean to others, we disrespect them, we put God in second, third, or last place. We become proud and arrogant. We forget or just plain do not want to give credit to God for the good in our lives. All of it is sin piling up between us and a perfect and holy God. In front of his shining holiness, we dump a pile of stinking trash.

But these Holy Scriptures which your parents have placed at the center of your life, these ***“make***

you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” In these words of God you see Jesus pick up the stinking pile of your sins. He doesn’t use a shovel to put them in a wheelbarrow, but he picks up your sins and puts that stinking dripping pile of garbage on his back. He carries your and my sins to the cross and leaves them there. He cleans you up and now God counts you holy. Knowing and trusting that is how you became wise for salvation.

“Continue in what you have learned.”

D. Continue, Remembering Those Who Went Before

“Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.” While the power of faith comes from God in his word, God always uses people to speak that word.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he was speaking about Timothy’s childhood. Like you three, Timothy learned God’s word from his first days. His mother taught him from the Hebrew Bible, what we call the Old Testament. She used the Old Testament because Jesus had not yet lived and died and rose again. She brought Timothy up in the faith of the God of Israel who had promised a Savior. So one day nearly twenty years after Jesus ascended to heaven, when Paul came into their town preaching about Jesus, the promised Savior, Timothy and his family looked on Jesus in faith.

Nolan, Abby and Cody, some might say that you learned God’s word from me and a couple other pastors in catechism class. That’s not the whole truth, it’s not even most of the truth. More than any pastor, first and foremost, it was your parents. These parents have cared for all your needs and a good deal of your wants. They have made sure you never missed a meal in your life. They have clothed you and put a roof over your head. They have taken you to dozens, to hundreds of music and sports practices and events. These parents who wake every morning thinking of you and so go to bed, these are the parents who have done something even greater. They brought each of you three to the Lord’s Baptism at a very young age. Through the years they have lived and taught you the habit of coming to the Lord’s house on a weekly basis. They are the ones who have made catechism class happen. And through them, you have known Jesus.

What a blessing you have! You have parents who need a Savior like you do. But they believe in that Savior. And they who love you have pointed you to your loving Savior.

“Continue.” Abby, Nolan, Cody, if there is anyone in this world you can trust to do the best for you, it is the ones sitting beside you this morning. As Paul said to his would-be son Timothy, so I say to you, ***“Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.”***

I pray that confirmation is not “The End” to you. Confirmation is a rest stop, a park bench. Today you, we, do take a moment to rest. We look back on what has been accomplished by God’s blessing. I, your teacher, think fondly of all the laughing and the learning from God’s Word of the last 18 months. You can say, “I’m done” to catechism class.

But here, even today as rest and feel the strength returning, God invites us further up the trail, ***“Continue in what you have learned.”*** Cody, Abby, Nolan: ***“Continue.”*** Amen.