

JJ¹

Today we celebrate the confirmation of Cal and Rachel. It's also the Festival of Pentecost. And what a wonderful festival to celebrate together with confirmation, but perhaps not for the reasons you might expect. Sometimes people think that at confirmation, young people are receiving special gifts of the Spirit, much like what happened on the first Pentecost with the Apostles. I imagine this thinking stems from a misplaced expectation that Pentecost should be happening again and again today. In fact, some people believe this so firmly and teach it so zealously, that they destroy the faith of some, casting them into the despair of focusing on unique gifts instead of the Giver.

Confirmation is just what that word means—a confirmation on the part of the person that the faith already created in Baptism and sustained by the Word is still living and growing. Pentecost was also a confirmation—a confirmation that Jesus kept his Word. "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

According to God's eternal plan, and while Jerusalem was again filled with people for the Festival of Pentecost... "Suddenly a sound like the rushing of a violent wind came from heaven, and it

filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently."

We're told that they went outside and spoke to all the people gathered in Jerusalem from all kinds of places throughout the Roman Empire. Each person hearing God's Word spoken in their own language! Instead of recognizing that God was pouring out a beautiful gift on his people that day, some tried to discredit the truth of God's Word by accusing them of being drunk. Peter speaks for the group and begins his great Pentecost sermon. Peter starts by assuring the people that they are not drunk, but that this was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

"This is what God says will happen in the last days: I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and a rising cloud of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And this will happen: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

The New Testament era had officially begun. It was the beginning of the end as the world now moved into the Last Days. Yet, for the Apostles and the other believers, this was **JUST THE END OF THE BEGINNING**. In a way you could say that Pentecost was graduation day from Jesus’ seminary training, but a Christian never graduates from Jesus’ schoolhouse of learning and growing in his Word. Just imagine if the Apostles had stopped after Pentecost! Everything would have quickly been lost. All it takes is one generation to give up teaching the next generation. If they had treated Pentecost as the end, this building wouldn’t be here, nor would any others like it be found in the world. And worst of all, you wouldn’t be here either.

Cal and Rachel, you know this to be true because of the Word of God we have studied together and you have even set in your hearts with your memory work. You know the painful truth King David confesses in Psalm 51: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5 NIV84).

You know that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23 NIV84). You know that all people by nature “[are] dead in [their] transgressions and sins” (Eph. 2:1 NIV84). You know that “The one who sins is the one who will die” (Ezek. 18:20 NIV84). And you know this death is threefold—it is spiritual, physical and eternal.

You know this is where you would be stuck now in time and for all eternity, and everyone who ever lived along with you if Pentecost was the end for the Apostles and God’s work through them in this world. But Pentecost was **JUST THE END OF THE BEGINNING** of gospel ministry which would travel down the long road of time all the way to you.

About 14 years ago, God the Holy Spirit stepped into each of your lives personally when you were baptized. In faith and love your parents brought you into God’s house. They brought you to church where the pastor did something that looks silly and insignificant, even cultish, to the unbelieving world. As simple water was sprinkled on your head, the Name on which you call was proclaimed over you. The name of our Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was then that the words at the end of



our text rang true for you: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

It was then that God the Holy Spirit did the impossible and made his home in your hearts! It was then that he made the blessings of the Son's sacrifice your very own. The Holy Spirit rescued you from the great danger of unbelief, the power of the devil and even hell itself! But that was just the beginning of your lives together with Jesus.

You continued to grow in your faith and lives with Jesus as you heard his Word in worship, Sunday School, and these last three years of Catechism Class. But all of this is **JUST THE END OF THE BEGINNING** of your lives with Christ. How many times do you think I've told you over the last three years that Confirmation is not graduation??? Many, many times! And I say it again to you today.

Again, just think of the terrible danger and disaster that would have fallen on the world if the Apostles had treated Pentecost as the end! It is important for you to remember the same is true of your Confirmation. Confirmation is not your golden ticket that gets you into heaven. It can't be for so many reasons, one of which being this is all a human tradition and if it were your golden ticket then that would make salvation your work! We

have often talked about how just as your bodies need food to survive, so do your souls. You starve your body, you'll end up killing it. You starve your soul, you'll end up killing your faith. And you know what? If you treat your Confirmation as the end of your time in God's Word, you're not just going to hurt yourself. You're going to hurt, and even help kill the faith of others in your lives.

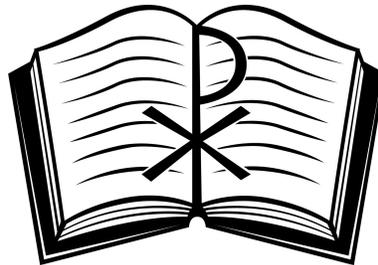
But I know that this is neither your desire or intention, as you'll confess before all these people here in just a few minutes. I know that you know that this is **JUST THE**

END OF THE BEGINNING

because by grace through faith, you want to follow your Savior Jesus every day of your lives. You know and believe that his blood was poured out for the forgiveness of every one of your sins, even for the days ahead when you

give in to the temptation to think that you've graduated from Jesus' schoolhouse of learning. Remember that forgiveness so that you daily go running back into Jesus' arms in repentance and regular worship in his house and study of his Word.

Cal and Rachel, and all of you gathered here today, be thankful that the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost has never ceased. You are proof of that today. The proof is found as you daily turn to your baptism and find the strength and desire to drown your sinful



nature through repentance. The proof is found as the Spirit continues to speak to your hearts through the unchanging Word of God. The proof is found every time you celebrate the Lord's Supper and believe Jesus' words, "This is my body, given for you...This is my blood, shed for you," so that you can leave God's house with peace in your hearts. The proof is found in the fact that the Holy Spirit continues to take up residence in new hearts every day.

Friends, Pentecost was **JUST THE END OF THE BEGINNING** of a long history of God's grace to mankind. May you treat each day you have on this earth the same way, growing in Christ and sharing that joy and peace with others so they too may call on the name of the Lord and be saved. Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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