

Palm Sunday – B
Text – Philippians 2:8

He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

TO SUFFER EVEN DEATH

You've probably heard the expression, "It's raining cats & dogs." Here's a new twist on it. "To tell the weather, go to your back door & look for the dog. If the dog is at the door & he's wet, it's probably raining. But if the dog is standing there really soaking wet, it's probably raining really hard.

If the dog's fur looks like it's been rubbed the wrong way, it's probably windy. If the dog has snow on his back, it's likely to be snowing. Of course, to be able to tell the weather like this, you have to leave the dog outside all the time, especially when you expect bad weather." This bit of advice is signed, Sincerely, The Cat. **PAUSE**

Just because someone is giving advice doesn't mean they have our best interests in mind. How do we go about telling the difference? Who are the people looking out for us, & who are the ones we just shouldn't trust? Learning exactly that is an important part of the process of growing up. Whom can you trust, & who should you not?

Rachel, Ciaron & Grace have many opportunities ahead to learn just that. You will make mistakes. You will make bad choices, but when you fail the almighty God & Savior of the world is right there, waiting to help you, to guide you & to strengthen you. As you cling to Jesus, through His immeasurable wisdom, you will also make good choices, & you will succeed.

That's because God has promised to overcome every single one of our mistakes. I'm not saying life will be easy, but it does mean we never need to be afraid of failure.

We never need to be afraid of the truth, because it's on our side, even when it hurts, even when we sin. Jesus Christ, our Lord & Savior, is the Truth. The non-Christian world doesn't know that. It doesn't believe that. Each of us will be tempted & tried & tested, but we can always face the challenge, & we can face the truth, but only in Christ. The answer is that simple to know, & yet it is oh so difficult to believe when we are struggling.

And when we're struggling, it's then that the lies of the world come calling. It's then Satan whispers in our ear, everyone but you believes in evolution. That creation story is just a fairy tale. When we're struggling with relationships the devil hints that marriage isn't necessary. All that matters is that you "love" each other.

It's seems to be only a subtle shift in thinking from creation to evolution, or from marriage to living together, but it's a foundational shift in our relationship to the God who created us. It's a shift away from the promises of a Savior who'd die for us, while we were broken & sinful, to the promises of a world that'll abandon us when we need help the most.

If you're old & frail, they want you to have the 'right' to be put to death. If you're inconvenient, & unborn, they want you to have the 'right' to be declared inhuman, so the world can abandon you without feeling guilty, when you need help the most.

Every single Christian sins daily & we sin willingly. All of us struggle with the fact that our lives are a mess because we aren't strong enough to defeat our sinful desires. Somehow people have gotten the idea that Christians are supposed to live lives

that appear holier than the lives of non-Christians. The temptation is overpowering for us to try & look good to others.

But the only way we can 'look' good is to lie about the truth, to cover it up, to smooth it over. Yet to forgive is not to cover up or smooth over or lie about sin.

To forgive is to admit that sin is there, that someone looks guilty, they look evil, they are evil, & yet because of the promises of Jesus we do not overlook their sins, we erase them, & with the eyes of faith then see that person as holy. We see them as holy because that's how our heavenly Father sees them. The sins are paid for no matter how difficult it is for us to accept. Gossip is more satisfying to our sinful nature, & the devil strongly encourages it, but forgiveness is more effective at helping people to find true healing from the effects of sin.

We're tempted to think that gossip is a way of 'getting even,' a way of making someone pay for their sins. But right there is a clear sign that we've gone wrong in our thinking. Our heavenly Father doesn't want us to pay for our sins. He loves us so much that He sent His own Son to do that for us. God created us out of love & He alone has our best interests at heart.

Because Grace & Ciaron & Rachel are sinful, because their minds & hearts don't work as they should, they've been tempted to believe that confirmation is simply a 'Lutheran' form of waterboarding. Satan has been whispering to them, maybe at times screaming, that all these sermon notes & memory work are a waste of time. You already know how to say, "Jesus."

The devil wants us to believe that religion is a cakewalk. You can do it blindfolded. You can do it in your sleep. You don't need to work at your relationship

with Jesus. The devil's advice does not have our best interests in mind & we need to recognize that. We need to learn how to recognize that. We need to learn how to respond when we've fallen for Satan's advice.

The Rite of Confirmation asks the questions it does, in order to help you prepare for the battle that is coming. When you were born it was entirely the job of your parents to protect you from Satan's attacks. As you grow older, increasingly, that battle becomes your own. Confirmation recognizes that fact, & the class you've 'endured' was an effort to prepare you.

I'll be asking, "Do you renounce the devil & all his works & all his ways?" It's an easy question to answer, but it's not an easy answer to live. The 'weather' introduction to this morning's sermon was a subtle & humorous attempt by the cat to gain an advantage.

And while it's healthy to be able to laugh at our mistakes & the stupid things we fall for, it's never healthy to take the devil lightly as if he is some kind of joke. That's what the sermon title is driving at. It comes from this line in the confirmation rite, "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession & Church, & to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away it?"

Being truthful & honest are godly attributes & they have their greatest power when we're using them to confess our sins. The world looks at that as pure foolishness. The world says, "It's not illegal if you don't get caught." What the world refuses to admit, what the world will never tell you, is that death is coming whether you get "caught" or not.

The devil & the world tell you, “That’s a depressing topic. Just ignore it. Go to a happy church instead. You don’t have to put up with that ‘sin’ talk. You’re young. Death is a long ways off. And Jesus has forgiven you anyway. Don’t worry. Be happy. Let the other fool confess his sins. You’ll get by with ignoring yours. It’s water over the damn. Live & let live.”

“Do you renounce the devil & all his works & all his ways? Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession & Church, & to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away it?” We talk about sin, & we talk about death, because they’re real. It’s like the RR Crossing signs, & gates, & flashing lights. We need to be warned about the possibility of death because it’s real.

Ignorance may be bliss but it won’t save us. Only Jesus Christ will. The devil does not have our best interests in mind, but he has led astray billions of people throughout world history. Today, Palm Sunday, is the day Jesus entered Jerusalem to die, & He died on account of your sins & mine. We talk about sin & death in order that we may talk about forgiveness & life.

Satan wants us to avoid that conversation. He wants us to pretend that none of them exist, not sin, not death, not forgiveness, not life. He right when he whispers that we cannot conquer them, but he’s wrong when he suggests that as a result we should just surrender. Jesus Christ has already won the victory. The worst possible thing we can do is to surrender to him. Confirmation class is about teaching us to surrender to Jesus. That’s what the reading from Philippians is about as well.

“...Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant,

being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

There is no failure on our part, there's no sin we commit, there is no depression deep enough, that is able to keep us away from the depth of Jesus' love for us, unless we reject Him. Even death does not need to be feared. Jesus died to make that clear. Jesus rose to prove that He has won the victory.

Satan's goal is to keep our faith weak, for God will not let us go as long as we remain connected to the Vine – Jesus Christ. Our Father in heaven will keep us from rejecting His Son as long as we remain in the Word, & remember what He did at our Baptism.

For a Christian, the process of unbelief always begins with taking our faith for granted. It always begins with drifting away from the Word. It always begins by taking our relationship with Jesus Christ lightly. Once it has root, unbelief will grow, but the Son of God will not give us up without a fight. Like the Good Shepherd He's constantly seeking us out.

He finds us in our gossip, not that He might gloat in embarrassing us, but that He might graciously show us the error of our ways & call us back to the harmony of forgiveness instead. Jesus finds us in our sexuality immorality not that He might ridicule us, but that He might lead us to the beauty of the marriage 'oneness' as God designed & created it to be.

God doesn't point out our sin in order to gloat, but because He knows that our sins bother us. They tear us apart & destroy us if we leave them hidden. When they're not confessed, Satan uses them to taunt & blackmail us. Out in the open, Jesus washes

them away, & He calls us to see each other as holy & innocent, in the same way that our heavenly Father sees all of His children. In the humility of that, we truly do not see ourselves as better than anyone, & there we find the unity & harmony that Father, Son & Holy Spirit have in the Trinity.

Jesus knows that all of this is impossible with man, but with our heavenly Father all things are possible. Thus knowing our sinful weakness, we answer several of the confirmation questions with the words, "I do, by the grace of God," for it is His grace that empowers us not only to believe that we are forgiven, but to live that life as well. Amen.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous & having salvation is He, humble & mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Amen.