

Mark D. Reichert

Confirmation Sunday – 1 Timothy 6:12-16 – Stay Close to Me!

5/21/23 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

This is a basic principle of competition, whether on the battlefield or the sports field: together we stand, divided we fall. Without chemistry, without trust, without balance, a team can't work together and so they ultimately can't succeed. An army that gets divided in battle gets conquered because they lose their order, their backup, and with them, their strength.

But with togetherness, there is victory – not just on the battlefield, not just in the sports arena, but in your spiritual lives, too. Make no mistake about it, there is a fight going on all around us between good and evil, and today you confirmands are taking a bold step right into the middle of the fray. So how are you going to survive and conquer? You need to stay close to Jesus and stay close to your fellow believers, because here you have strength, encouragement, support, and hope that none of your enemies can stand against. Just as a military officer might scream it to his troops and a coach might yell it to his players, today especially and every day your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ calls to you, Stay close to me – for faithfulness, for protection, and for your eternal reward.

At least right now, for us, this fight isn't a physical one. It doesn't include guns and knives and hand-to-hand combat, but it is all-out warfare against total faithfulness to God and his Word. More and more society tells us that the Bible isn't worth your time and attention, that everything else is more important than being here and feeding your faith, that solid religious beliefs are a thing of the past and if you don't get with the times, you're backward, bigoted, and ignorant. And while (thank the Lord) we here in Beaver Dam haven't had to deal with the worst of that like in some places, our world and our culture are setting their sights on Christianity and making us into a target. Jesus told us that the world will hate us because of him, and we can see it happening even right now.

But what you have is something so much greater than anything this world can offer. You have Christ and all the gifts and blessings that come along with him for now and forever. You spent all this time in Catechism class to give you a solid foundation of training and instruction in the Lord, his Word, and your salvation that will guide you for the rest of your lives and into eternal life. This world can offer you all the *selfish*, sinful pleasures you could ever want – sex, money, fun, independence, and the list goes on – but just know that apart from faithfulness to Jesus Christ your life could never find its truest meaning and fulfillment. So stay close to Jesus, love being in his Word and here in his house, because that's the way that your spiritual life will grow and flourish so nothing in this sinful world can drag you down, and that's the way that you really can live a life of true faithfulness, peace, joy, love, and blessedness, as your Savior wants for you on your road toward heaven.

But be aware also that on a great day like this, the devil sees you in your white gowns making your good confessions in the presence of many witnesses, and he's licking his chops. He's looking at you like a full course meal. He wants to take you down, and he's going to put all kinds of temptations in your way to do it. Maybe physical persecution will come one day. But as long as he can get you to

sleep in on Sunday mornings, as long as he can get you to say to yourselves, "I don't need to go to church because I just spent two years learning all that stuff and I already know everything I need," as long as he can get you to busy up your schedule with jobs or sports or weekend activities so it crowds out worship time here in God's house, or as long as he can get you to only bother coming to church on Christmas and Easter (if even that), then he's already winning. So any of those sound familiar? Every time the devil whispers something like that in your ear, he's trying to lull you to spiritual sleep to make you drift away from Christ, his cross, and even heaven itself – and he will, if you let him.

So people of God, let the devil's temptations drive you not away from Christ, but toward him all the more, because he's your protection from all the devil's lies and schemes. Jesus calls to you, Stay close to me!, because he's the one who has the power to stand up against the devil and all the forces of evil. No matter how the devil and this sinful world try to stamp out your faith and intimidate you into forsaking your Savior, you need to know that they're nothing but phonies and they have absolutely no real power over you. Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, who is ruling over all creation even right now for your sake and working all things for the good of those who love him. So stay close to Jesus, your Rock and your Fortress, and keep your eyes focused on him and his Word, because then nothing else can touch you and nothing can keep him from bringing you home to heaven.

Yes, there are lots of blessings that come with staying close to Jesus. It's just that it can be hard to always see them in the here and now. The Christian life can be tough, especially with all the flak you'll take from the world and society around you. Spiritually speaking, these next ten years into high school and college and early adulthood will be the toughest of your lives with all the pressures from different groups who want to destroy your faith, and sometimes you might wonder, is it worth it? Well, my friends, don't ever doubt that the answer is absolutely *yes!* Jesus himself was willing to suffer the worst torment this world has ever known for our sake, so that in the end we could have salvation and an eternal reward as heirs of his heavenly kingdom, so again friends, don't doubt that it *will* be more than worth it in the end – Jesus himself guarantees it. And so still now he calls you to stay close to him through thick and thin – a call to faithfulness that is worthy of the solemn vow you're making today before God and his Church, because it is *that* important for your spiritual lives and eternities that you stay just as committed in faith to Jesus as he was first to you, and because your reward that's waiting for you in heaven with Jesus will be so much greater than any of the troubles you may have to go through along the way.

See, one day Jesus is going to come back for us and right all the wrongs that have been done to his people in this world, and he's going to put an end to all the sin and evil that caused them. He who is immortal is going to give us immortality; he who lives in the holiness of unapproachable light will give us that holiness as our entrance into the light of everlasting life; and he whose glory no one has ever seen or can see will welcome us into our heavenly home where we *will* be blessed to see him in his glory face-to-face forever. So my brothers and sisters, stay close to Jesus for faithfulness, for protection, and for your eternal reward, and know that all the joys and pleasures and perfections of paradise will be yours. God grant it. Amen.