

Rooted and Grounded in Love
Confirmation Sunday
6/7/15

**Dear friends in Christ,
Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.**

Brian, Kristofer, Kayla, Caity, Jason, Eve, Sara
Brooke and Ashley... this is quite a day!

I'd like to begin just by letting you know happy I am for you
as you celebrate this milestone in your walk with Christ.

And not just me, but this whole room is full of people
who love you, and are filled with joy to see you affirming your faith today
your faith in the promises God made to you in Holy Baptism
and the faith that God will continue to walk with you each day of your lives.

And there is a passage of Scripture that I've been praying for you this whole year.
It's prayer from Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

This is a powerful prayer.
It's a life-changing prayer.
It's a prayer in which Paul, is pouring out his heart to God
and lifting up these people whom he dearly loves.

Think about that for just a moment.
Think about the people in your life who love you the most.
Think about the people who love you when you're easy to love and when you're not so easy to
love. You never have days like that do you? :)

Their love for you is strong,
but Paul tells us that God's love for us, is even stronger.
It goes way beyond what we can even imagine.

Listen to this amazing prayer as I share it with you again.
Listen to how Paul pours out his heart before God:
Paul writes:

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth
derives its name.”

I want to pause there for just a second.
Notice how he prays, and to whom he prays. He says, "I kneel before the Father."

I want you to know it wasn't customary for the Jews to bow their knees in prayer. We think of kneeling as a common way people pray, but the Jews usually prayed standing with arms outstretched to God.

It was only when something was of deep, intense concern that they bowed their knees before God; so here we can see the intensity of his love for these people and how deeply he wants them to know God's love.

Also notice also to whom Paul addresses his prayer. He bows before the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name."

What does that mean?

It means that every blessing, every good thing comes from our Heavenly Father. And God is the Father of every family. God wants every child to be blessed with:

- protection and loving guidance
- shared joys, kindness, and affection
- forgiveness and understanding
- wisdom and boundaries
- and everything we need from day to day

On earth there is no perfect family but God is our perfect Heavenly Father and out of his glorious riches we can trust God for what we need.

And God will work through this church family to come along beside you and strengthen your family.

And on top of that listen to this:

Paul prays:

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

When I read this passage, with our Confirmation class in mind the phrase that jumped out at me was:

"strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being"

How many of you have a great self-image?

How many of you, at times, wish you were like someone else?

I think of when I was in 8th grade, and the number of times I wished I was taller, or smarter, or a better athlete, or got the attention of girls like the popular guys did.

No matter what age we are those are common feelings. We wish we had something that we see in other people. But the question at the root of all those feelings is this:

“Who am I?

“Do people love me for who I am?”

But behind those two questions is an even bigger question:

“Where does our sense of self-worth come from?”

If it comes from our talents, our performance at school or work or the clothes we wear, or any of our possessions if it comes from what other people say about us or how many friends we have then we’re building it on pretty shaky ground.

But then remember Paul’s prayer:

instead of all those external things, Paul prays for our strength to come from a different source.

Paul knows that all those external things will never make a person happy.

They will never give you a joy that lasts.

They will never sustain you through all the storms of life.

Instead he prays that God will “strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”

It’s God’s power and God’s strength that you can count on.

Everything else fades.

Everything else will disappoint you.

But not God.

The world gives you a distorted picture of yourself.

It tells you, you are only worth being loved

for what you can produce, your grades, the college you go to

or the possessions you have,

or what other people say about you.

The world says, “that’s what makes you somebody.”

But God simply declares it, “You are somebody”

Because I created you.

I formed you in your mother’s womb.

And I love you.

Do you remember the name game we played at our last Confirmation class?
For the rest of the congregation, what we did as we went around the circle was to say our name, and then we each shared one thing that we know is true about ourselves.

Like... my name is Marty and Jesus loves me.
or my name is Brooke and God forgives all of my sins.
or my name is Sara and I am a child of God.

Think of all the other true things we could add to that list:

- Nothing can ever separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus.
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me
- God delights in me
- God has a plan for me – to give me a hope-filled future
- No one can snatch me out of my Father’s hand
- If God takes care of the tiniest sparrow, how much more will he then take care of me
- as far as the East is from the West, so far has God removes me sins from me

and this list could go on and on.

God wants us to take these truths and hold on to them
and see ourselves more and more
through His eyes, not the world’s eyes.

And as Jesus says, “then we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free.”
And God gives us that strength through his Spirit, in our inner being,
so that Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith.

And now, comes the part of the prayer that we chose as the theme for your Confirmation banner.

Paul wants the people he’s praying for to have that spiritual inner strength
and Christ living in their hearts...
not so that they can go around and feel superior to others
and look around and judge others...
he wants them to have that strength so that they might be filled with God’s love.

More than anything else, God wants you to be filled with His love.
Here’s how Paul expresses it:

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Some Christians get that backwards.

They think being a Christian is about having all the right answers or all the right behaviors.

And it's not that God, doesn't want us to live our lives honorably He certainly does.

But it starts with grasping how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and abiding in the love of Christ, being filled with the love of Christ so that we can reflect that love to a world that needs it so badly.

Just a few weeks ago, I met a man whose life was changed by love like that. We were thinking about having some work done at our house and so I made a few phone calls, and made a few appointments so we could get some estimates

One of the guys who stopped over, had worked for his dad while he was learning the business, and now he and his brother are the one who run it.

So he came and gave us the estimate and as he was leaving he asked me what I do, and I said, "I'm a pastor." And he replied, "I'm a chaplain."

And then he explained that he and his wife take two weekends every month and join a ministry team that goes into one of California's prisons that houses inmates that have been sentenced for life.

And what was remarkable about that, is that this is his life mission. He plans to continue to visit these inmates every month for the rest of his life.

He know their lives can be changed, because his life was changed. He had a rough childhood. He did a lot of bad things. Things that he's not proud of, but God never gave up on him.

Looking for some structure in his life he got involved with the Jehovah Witnesses.

But he met God for the first time, when he was going door to door and at one home, instead of getting the door slammed in his face a lady who was well past retirement age invited him in and overwhelmed him with her kindness.

Instead of rejecting him she invited him to come in and have a cup of coffee. And she invited him to read to her out of his King James Bible.

And the passage she asked him to read was from Zechariah chapter 12.
And so he started reading... but she stopped him
and asked him, "Who is speaking there."

And he looked down at his Bible until he found the words,
"Thus saith the Lord." So it was obvious, God was speaking.

And she said, go on.
And he kept reading until he got to verse ten.
where it says, "then they will look on Me whom they pierced."

And she said, who is speaking there?
And suddenly it came to him, it was Jesus.
And he felt the love of Jesus in a way that he had never felt before.

He had been taught that Jesus was not God.
But in that moment, he knew not only that Jesus was God,
but that Jesus was his Savior, that Jesus had been pierced for him.

And it wasn't because he had heard a great lecture about Jesus.
It was because he saw Jesus' love so clearly in this dear old lady.
He went back to his elders, and they forbade him from going back to see her.
They said, "she had her chance" which he knew was not reflective of God's love for all people.

But from that moment on he was changed.
And for the last 15 years now, he has been going to a church in San Juan...
and trying to live out the love that he saw in that woman.

That's was Paul's prayer for the Ephesians,
that they would know how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,
and be filled with the love of Christ forever.

And that's my prayer for you. Amen.