

*Confirmed in Blood*

Today is a very special and happy day in our congregation. At the [10:30] service today two young people, Jordan and Cassie, will be confirmed. They will affirm their Baptism, and receive the laying on of hands and anointing with oil for the stirring up of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They will be officially taking on adult privileges and responsibilities in the church. Today they will be claiming the traditional faith and historic teachings of the church that they were raised to believe and love as their very own.

Even though many of you don't know Jordan and Cassie personally, I would like to encourage all you to think of them today and always as if they were your children or grandchildren, or your sisters, or your nieces or cousins, because in a way they are. The Christian church is like one big family in that we all love and care for each other the way a family should. All the children of the church are kin to each of us. Today our church family celebrates the Confirmation of these two young people, these two children of ours.

I can tell you that these two young ladies are especially bright and vivacious. We have high hopes for them. We trust that their dreams and talents will take them far. We always hope that our children will have lives better than our own. That's part of the American dream, that our children will have better lives than we did. We want them to see more of the world, and have more opportunities, and achieve more than we did. Until recently, we could

usually count on the succeeding generation having better lives than their parents' generation. That's not necessarily a given in our society anymore.

Still we trust that these two young people will do well and have good educations, successful careers, and raise nice families, and have all around healthy, happy lives. Of course, there is something more important in life than material success or monetary rewards, and even more important than having the respect and esteem of you peers. What's more important is being committed to whatever it is God calls you to do. What's more important is following Christ wherever he leads you. Being a faithful Christian, a person of integrity and righteousness, is more important than any trophy or title this world can offer. Of course, not everyone today places such high value on the Christian way of life or gives such honor to Christ and his teachings.

I would not be surprised if someday a child brings a lawsuit against his parents for having him baptized. I would not be surprised if someday someone sues me for having once confirmed that person in the Christian faith. You see, while one hand being a Christian can be an expressible joy, on the other hand, being a Christian is not without it trials and bitter pains. The benefit of being a Christian is often intangible, it is unseen by most of the world, and, therefore, many people think it simply doesn't exist. We might describe part of the advantage of being a Christian as invisible, or maybe even other worldly, as we as we are promised Christ's presence with in us in this life and eternal life in the world to come – things much of the world would not acknowledge as true. I would disagree, but one could argue in court that not only does Baptism not deliver what it promises, it also does harm. It's abusive.

The expectations that come with being a Christian -- following all the Commandments, sacrificing yourself for the sake of others, not always demanding your rights – are downright opposed to worldly success. Christianity is not necessarily a recipe for health and wealth; it's more of a plan, a set up really, for austerity and humiliation. Teaching a child Christian ethics, not to lie, cheat or steal, limits his prospects in the business world. Convincing a young person that faithfulness to the Word of the Lord is more important than the personal pursuit of happiness is going to take the fun out a lot of entertainments for him. And that's why a child might someday litigate for compensation for the disadvantages in this world done by Baptism into Christ and confirmation as a member of his church.

That the greatest person in the church is humble servant of all, not the exalted leader, was something James and John and the other disciples had to learn. They wanted positions of honor, positions that they imagined came with all kinds of perks and deferential treatment from others, but Jesus had something else in mind for them. As followers of Christ, they were going to be slandered, not celebrated. They were going to be persecuted, not praised. The Baptism Jesus referred to was the baptism of his own death and resurrection, and the cup he was to drink was the bitter cup of God's wrath that he drank to the dregs. Do we want that kind of baptism? Can you drain that cup?

That's how it always is with those who follow Christ. Lies and rumors are spread about them behind their backs. People that they thought were friends turn against them and mock them. True Christians are rejected and

mistreated by all. To all the world being a faithful Christian looks like nothing but pain and suffering – and indeed there are those out there who are dedicated to making committed Christians suffer for their faithfulness. But to suffer along with Jesus is the greatest honor of all. Jesus says, “blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you, and utter all sorts of evil about you falsely for my sake, rejoice and be glad for in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you.” It is a privilege to be crucified along with Christ for the sake for the gospel.

So on this Confirmation Day all of us who have been baptized and confirmed should remember that it is our calling endure with patience the injustice of the world, injustice aimed at us because we belong to Christ. There is no greater testimony to our faith than that we bear the wounds and the scars of Christ. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek, and to forgive those who sin against us because they don’t know what they are doing. I am constantly moved and humbled by the witness of Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand, who was tortured for 14 years in communist prisons. Once, one of his torturers said to him, “I am all powerful as you imagine your God to be; I have the power to kill you.” And Pastor Wurmbbrand replied, “All the power is mine, I have the power to love and forgive you, even though you slay me.”

One of the reason that the early Christian church embraced infant baptism was that during the time of the persecutions many parents of young children were martyred. There was no guarantee that the parents would live long enough to teach the Christian faith to their children, so promises were made godparents, and the whole church really, to bring up their children in the

church, knowing and loving Christ. As children came of age then they affirmed the faith previously confessed for them as their own. Jordan, and Cassie, and all of us are God's children and Christ is our Savior. His teaching has been made known to us. We are invited to cling to him in faith for our salvation. Let us walk with Him, wherever he leads us, come what may. Amen.