

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

Dear friends, and especially you, Lydia, my sister in Christ.

Oh, it was magnificent! I wish you could have seen it. Many say no church was ever as beautiful as that one. It took seven years to build. It was 90 feet long and 30 wide with 30 foot high ceilings. It was made of stone, covered with solid cedar paneling and then overlaid with pure gold. There were carvings of angels on the doors. Two bronze pillars guarded the entrance, topped by two bowl shaped capitals, which were festooned with 400 bronze pomegranates (a fruit) strung on a network of beautifully arranged chains. As I say, I wish you could have seen the Temple: words don't do it justice. For that matter, I wish **I** could have seen it. By being simple the splendid altar just outside the Temple directed worshipers' attention to the offerings brought to it so everyone could think about what God was doing for his people through those offerings. This was a building which shouted, "Glory to God in the highest!" When it was time to dedicate this dazzling church building, the king offered a special prayer that we could learn a lot from this Confirmation Day.

*<sup>22</sup>Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven <sup>23</sup>and said: "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep*

*your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way."* But then Solomon looked around at that splendid building he had just completed, and he realized what a poor and miserable thing it was compared to the almighty, all-glorious, all-present God. And so he had to ask: "<sup>27</sup>*But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!*" Do you see the point? God doesn't need a church building to live in. Heaven is his home and earth is his footstool. So Solomon realized: The building wasn't as important as the Lord. And he had the Lord.

Now, keep that in mind, because we're going to leave that church building and fast forward in time to our church building where something similar is going on. Solomon dedicated a building to God. You, my young friend, are dedicating your life to God. After four long years of catechism instruction, you know what you're getting into. You've been exposed to all the basic teachings of the Bible several times. You checked out well over 350 Bible passages to see if I was teaching you my opinions or God's Word. You memorized Luther's summaries of Bible teachings, also known as the Small Catechism (much of which you can recite from memory). You memorized over 100 Bible passages.

And now, because you've been attending worship faithfully and frequently, you're

ready to be confirmed. But what is confirmation? Because confirmation is a church custom not commanded or forbidden by God in the Bible, people think of it in a number of ways. Some folks, for instance, think you will be renewing your Baptism vows this morning. But does that ring true? Not really. If any vows were spoken at your Baptism, someone else spoke them for you because you were an infant. How can you renew a vow you didn't speak yourself? Besides, Baptism is really God's work, not ours. We don't help God give us eternal life through Baptism, we just receive it. Your forgiveness was complete when God gave it to you. So your confirmation today can't complete your Baptism. \*Nor should we think of confirmation as upgrading your membership to first class after so many frequent flyer miles to and from catechism classes. You have been a full member of the church for about fourteen years already through Baptism. You simply weren't ready to profess your faith publicly like you will today, or to receive Lord's Supper.

So what is confirmation? It is basically a chance for you to do two things: 1) acknowledge that the Holy Spirit brought you to faith through God's Word and Sacrament, and 2) promise that you'll use the Word and Sacrament frequently and faithfully so that the Holy Spirit can keep you in faith until you leave this earth.

Confirmation is a promise. You are

making a public commitment in front of all these witnesses. (But don't be scared. Almost everyone else here once stood in front of the church and made the same commitment. They love you and are excited for you.) Do I even need to point out that your commitment is a decision, not a feeling? It is a promise you keep regardless of how you may feel later on. Emotion may say, "Quit, give up, bail out," but commitment says "Stay, hold on, hang in there, work at it." Why stay with Jesus? Well, certainly because he loves you. But I hope you stay with Jesus for the rest of your life partly because of the promise you make today, ...because your word means something, ...because you said you would, ...because you are committed. Commitment isn't affected by circumstances. We don't ask, "What will it cost me if I keep my promise? Well, that's not too bad. I guess I'll live up to my commitment." That's not commitment. That's convenience. Pity the church where any of the members thinks that things should be made convenient for them—that's not the servant-attitude the Lord wants oozing out of his followers. Servants who are committed stay true even when circumstances are hard. Commitment involves backbone and character. It is doing what you said you would do even when you don't feel like it. People who want to be Christians without commitment to Christ are missing the point. If you're going to be committed to Jesus, you may lose friends and popularity. But God will bless your commitment to Jesus with

wonders you have to experience in order to appreciate. Ask any of these other church members, “Has it been worthwhile to stick with Jesus?”, and they’ll smile, maybe even get a tear in their eye, and answer, “Oh, yes! I can’t even tell you all the good things God has done for me. There’s too much to remember.”

And now for a really hard question: has anyone here in church today kept their confirmation promise without ever denying Christ? We stood in front of our church and said we would suffer all things, even death, rather than turn away from the Lord. But each of us has turned away from the Lord for segments of our life. Was it for a better paycheck, for sleep, for a party, for friends who insisted on their way (not God’s), for our own interests, for things of a sexual nature? Well, if not a single one of us confirmed Christians has kept our confirmation promise, is it still valid? And if not a single one of us has fully honored our commitment to the Lord, why do we keep asking our young catechumens and our new adult members to make promises which we know they are not going to keep?

Because of what Solomon learned after spending the equivalent of over a billion dollars on one relatively small church building for God. The building wasn’t as important as the Lord. And so The promise isn’t as important as the Lord. But your promise is still important. For one thing, we Christians love to confess

what we believe (Romans 10:10). And another thing: we do intend to suffer all things rather than fall from Christ. But neither an oath, nor a vow, nor a promise will keep anyone faithful to the Lord at all times. Just ask any Christian who has struggled with a sin and tried to fix the problem by saying: “I promise, dear Lord, I won’t do it again.” Did it work? No! A short time later you were back on your knees praying the same thing because you fell into sin again—even though you just promised. But you see, the promise isn’t as important as the Lord. And you have the Lord. He bought you with the blood of Christ. He brought you to faith. He now lives in your heart.

You have the Lord. How good is that? Well, <sup>22</sup>*Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven* <sup>23</sup>*and said: “O LORD, God of Israel, THERE IS NO GOD LIKE YOU in heaven above or on earth below—you who **keep your covenant** of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.*

Wait a minute: “you keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way”? That sounds like we still have to bring our whole heart to the Lord first. That can’t be right. Our hearts would often rather be somewhere else than with the Lord. So why does Solomon make such a big deal out of our whole-hearted dedication to the Lord? Answer: To keep our sinful flesh

from claiming, “See, I don’t have to make any promises to God. God did everything to save me. So I’ll just sit back and do nothing.” No, no, no. Now that the Lord has rescued us from all sin, he wants us to work at following his commandments (make plans, involve others). That’s why the Holy Spirit had Solomon include the words about continuing wholeheartedly in God’s way. And that’s why we make our confirmation vows. But we remember: the promises we make to the Lord are not as important as the promise he made to us in Baptism (“I will not remember your sins”). That’s why no matter how many times you come back to the Lord and say, “I have sinned,” he says “I have forgiven you for Jesus’ sake.” O LORD, THERE IS NO GOD LIKE YOU.

The older I get, the more I’m convinced that the most important thing we need to hear in every worship service is that our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. And that’s why, dear Lydia, the most important question you will answer this morning is the last one, which basically says, “Will you keep studying God’s Word for yourself and will you keep coming to God’s house to hear the Lord tell you over and over ‘I will not count your sins against you’?” That’s important because it’s not the promises you make which will keep you on the path to heaven, it is the Lord’s forgiveness through Jesus that will keep you on the path to heaven.

I hope your attitude is: “If God is going to treat me so well, then I will commit myself

to serving him.” This commitment will help you in many circumstances. Sometimes your commitment to Jesus will help you to turn down an opportunity to do something if it means missing an opportunity to gather with your church family to hear God’s Word. Sometimes your commitment to Jesus will help you turn down a boyfriend’s repeated urgings to take things further than what pleases God. Sometimes your commitment to Jesus will help you turn down your boss when s/he asks you to work during Wednesday Lenten services. Sometimes your commitment to Jesus will help you attend Bible study, even when the pastor’s teaching style doesn’t mesh well with your way of learning. Sometimes your commitment to Jesus will help you turn your back on your friends and leave if they start doing things that your Best Friend Jesus would not approve of, whether it’s raunchy jokes or drugs or abusing alcohol. Sometimes your commitment to Jesus will help you not “over-do it” on Saturday so that you’re fresh on Sunday and can give your full attention to God’s Word during worship.

Dear Lydia, you’re just starting your long journey into adult Christianity today. You’ve also got a God who wants to help you succeed. He will hear your promise today. He will help you keep your promise. He will forgive you when you fail, because he is committed to giving you eternal life through faith in Jesus. O LORD, THERE IS NO GOD LIKE YOU.