

*My son, keep your father's commands
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*
²¹ *Bind them upon your heart forever;
fasten them around your neck.*
²² *When you walk, they will guide you;
when you sleep, they will watch over you;
when you awake, they will speak to you. (Proverbs 6:20-22)*

Give this Gift to your Mother!

Do you know what question I've heard more than any other in the last couple of weeks? "Why would you have confirmation on Mother's Day?" Even pastors have asked me that question! Ordinarily, we have confirmation on the first Sunday in May, but this year Easter was on the last Sunday in April and we needed time in between. Now, I did check with the mothers of all our confirmands last year already to make sure that they were OK with this decision. But I wasn't totally unhappy with the calendar accident. Most of the time when I explain the decision, I don't start with the date of Easter. Rather, I answer their question with another question: "What better Mother's Day present could there be than to hear your child confess their faith in Christ?" I don't plan to make this an every year thing, but I do believe that for a Christian mother, hearing her son or daughter confess their faith and their commitment to remain faithful for the rest of their lives is a wonderful blessing. It's a gift – and it shouldn't only come on confirmation day. The seven young people who will confess their faith today do have a unique opportunity to give a precious gift to their mothers and their fathers. But all of us have a similar, if somewhat less dramatic, opportunity every day of our lives. **Give this gift to your mother!**

- I. **Let her hear you confess your faith.**
- II. **Let her see the benefit of faith in your life.**

I.

King Solomon said, "**My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching.**" God calls parents to teach their children the gospel. Now, that doesn't mean that pastors and teachers don't have a role to play. We do. But King Solomon assumed that every believing parent would be doing this work. He assumed the fathers would command their children – by which he means that they would insist on Christian conduct and serious study of the word. He assumed that mothers would teach their children. A former president of our synod once wrote that he learned theology from his mother. She taught him about Jesus from little on. How many of us remember our mothers reading Bible stories to us? How many of us spent our childhoods saying table prayers with our mothers? How many of our mothers sat next to us in church and listened to our memory work and taught us simple little songs like "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know"?

But the four commands that King Solomon issues in these three verses are not for parents. They're all for their children. The day comes in the life of every child when he or she must take responsibility for his or her own faith. Today we will ask these young people to make a commitment to live as King Solomon commands all of us to live. When the congregation asks them to make that commitment, I hope that we all will remember that we made that same commitment ourselves.

Solomon said, "**Bind them**" – your father's commands and your mother's teaching – "**upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck.**" What does that mean? In the Bible, the heart is not just the seat of emotion. It's the seat of thought, of individuality, of our inner being. The good news about Jesus and his love should inform all that we think and feel, all that we care about. The good news about Jesus should be at the center of our existence. Along with that message of love should also be God's teaching about how a believer lives. You can never separate faith and life. So you can never separate the good news of Christ and the changes that God expects to see in our lives because we are believers. Tying those teachings around our neck means that they will lead us. If you have a rope around your neck and the person holding it wants you to turn left or right, you have no choice but to turn. Solomon tells us to make the word of God a rope around our necks guiding every aspect of our lives.

The part that's a challenge to you young people and to us old people is the command to bind and fasten those things on ourselves. Solomon does not imagine that we sit by passively while someone else – our parents, our pastors, our teachers – does that for us. God calls every Christian to bind the gospel to his own heart and fasten it around his own neck. God is talking about a total commitment from us to live as believers every day of our lives.

Do we do that? You young people today are going to confess that you believe that the teaching of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is true to the Word of God and you're going to promise to suffer death and all rather than fall away from that teaching and to conform all your lives to that teaching. Every confirmed member of the Lutheran Church present here today made the same kind of promise at some point in our lives. Are we prepared to keep it? Are we prepared to put Christ first in our lives? Are we prepared to trust him and live in a way that makes no sense to the world around us? Are we prepared to regularly drag ourselves out of bed on Sunday morning so that we can be in church to hear about Jesus and to receive communion? Are we prepared to take a generous portion of the money we make and give it back to God, trusting that we'll be better off for doing so? Are we prepared to reject the lies of the devil and the society we live in about sex and alcohol and popularity and money? Are we prepared to be unpopular to be faithful to Christ?

It's hard to keep that oath. The devil constantly tries to make us see things as more gray than black and white. He wants us to believe that a little sin here and there is no big deal. He wants us to accept the proposition that no one can perfectly keep the promise we make when we're confirmed so we shouldn't really try. As long as your heart is in the right place, it doesn't really matter if you live with your girlfriend or cheat on your income tax or drink too much when you're out with your friends. Everybody does those things! And of course, getting to church every Sunday is a nice idea. But it's not very practical and the truth is, that pastor repeats himself so much that if we miss now and again, we're not really going to feel lost when we do come. Do those temptations sway you? If those don't, some temptations do. Every sin that we commit is a denial of the oath that we take at our confirmation because we're conforming our lives to the devil and our own sinful flesh and the society we live in lead us instead of following what God says. For that, God should send us all to hell forever.

But Jesus died for all that sin. Unlike us, he kept his oath when he came down to this world and faced everything that life in a sinful world inflicts on us. He perfectly followed his Father in all things. He did that for us. He did that because we can't. Because he did, it counts for us. God sees us as if we were perfect. Jesus died and paid for all the times and all the ways that we failed to live up to what we were taught and to what we swore. Jesus died and paid because even confirmed Christians are still sinners and day by day, the devil wins and we follow him instead of following God. Jesus died and paid because not one of us is able to perfectly keep the commitment we made.

Jesus died and he paid for you, our confirmands for 2011 for you, the members of Peace Lutheran Church, and for you, the family and friends of these seven young people whatever church you belong to and even if you don't yet belong to any church at all. Jesus died and paid for every sin of every person who has ever been born or who ever will be born. God comes to us in the gospel so that we know that. God comes to us in communion and gives us the body and blood of Christ so that we receive the forgiveness for our sins. The commitment you confirmands are making is a commitment to hear that God loves you, that he forgives you, that he has bought and paid for you and he will not give up on you. You are promising to come again and again and hear God's promise that you will live with him forever. This morning, **give this gift to your mother: let her hear you confess your faith in Christ.**

II.

Parents are a blessing. That's why we have Mother's and Father's Day. But Christian parents who bring their children to the cross and the empty tomb are an infinitely greater blessing. Knowing our Savior changes us. It makes us want to know how God wants us to live. And it makes us want to live that way. After telling us to bind our Christian parents' teaching to our hearts and our necks, Solomon says, **"When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you."** He's talking about teaching our children a new way of life. It all begins with Christ. Everything that Solomon says in this verse comes from a heart that knows and trusts in Jesus. That heart is taught to follow Jesus. It's taught how to live in this world so that our faith shows itself in all that we do. But the power behind the change is the gospel.

Solomon says that when the gospel is bound to our hearts and our lives, then when we walk, what we have learned will guide us. The Bible loves to describe life in terms of walking. Where will we walk? How will we walk? Why will we walk in that way? That all depends on what's in our hearts and our minds. Will we wind up spending our lives in the gutter, drinking or doing drugs? Will we spend our lives devoted to our families and working for their benefit? Will we be hard workers or lazy? All these things depend on what's in our heart. What should be in our heart is God's love for us in Christ. If Jesus' love for us is the most important thing we know, then we will have a deep desire to know how God wants us to walk in all those other things. We will explore the Scriptures. We will listen to the wisdom of parents and pastors and other Christians. The more of God's Word we have in our hearts, the more guidance we have for our lives.

Solomon says that when we sleep, the Word of God will watch over us. Do you stop being a believer when you sleep? No. Because faith isn't a decision or an attitude of yours, it's a gift God gives through the gospel. Even if you were in a coma for years, your faith would continue. It would keep you safe from hell and bring you to eternal life. Plant that gospel deep in your hearts and when you can't be here, when you sleep, when you reach 117 years old and you have trouble thinking clearly, your faith will continue because the power of God is in the gospel.

Solomon tells us that what we have learned about Christ and his love and then how he calls us to live will speak to us when we awake. The more you plant God's word in your heart, the more you meditate on it. The more you think about it. The more you understand it, because the Holy Spirit always works through the gospel. Every one of us has a lifelong process of maturing in our faith. We do that only one way: through the Word of God. We hear the gospel and our faith grows. We trust in Jesus and we continually renew our commitment to living for him. We repent of our sins, we hear that we are forgiven, and we ask God to lead us in a new life that turns from those sins. In all that, the Word of God speaks to us.

My young friends, you are not the people you would have been without the gospel. None of us is. Every day of your life will be different because God gave you faith. Let your faith show itself. Simply live with your faith at the heart of everything. People who know believers can't help but see that faith. That's the gift that God has given you. It is a gift to all of us when we can see your faith. To you – and to all the rest of us gathered here on this Mother's Day – I say, **give this gift to your mother: let her see the benefits of faith in your life.**

Today, we get to see that benefit in a very special way: through the confession of faith of seven young people, who have heard the word, who have been instructed in what God has promised them and in what he commands them, who have asked for this privilege. Now, we call on them to give us all the precious gift of hearing their confession of faith. In that we will see how much they have already benefited from that faith. Amen.