

20 November 2022; Colossians 1:11-20; Pastor Fraser Pearce

Today is Confirmation Sunday
But I want to start by talking about marriages
And about what happens as we attend marriage ceremonies
In the church, even in this church.

We come, whether we ourselves are single or married
And we hear a man and a woman
Promise to be faithful to each other as long as they both live.
We also hear Jesus' words concerning their marriage:
What God has joined together, let no one separate.

So, whether we attend as single or married people
We hear the couple make their vows,
And we hear their vows confirmed by God's word.
If we are married we sense that attending a marriage
Is a call by God to us to reaffirm our own marriage vows,
And to be encouraged by God's word
To live faithfully in married love.
If we are single we receive again God's teaching on marriage,
And consider what it means to live faithfully as a single person,
And perhaps what it would mean to receive the calling
To live in the state of holy marriage.

Today we hear young people young people make their promises,
And we see them receive strengthening in their life of faith
As they receive blessing in God's name through the laying on of hands.
If we come as baptised people who confess the faith,
We can take this day as an opportunity to reaffirm our own promises
That we made when we were confirmed,
And we can be encouraged as we receive God's word today.
And if we are not baptised or do not confess the faith,
We can consider what life with God might look like for us,
And what it would mean to be called by God into the life of faith.

We'll get to the confirmation promises today,
But first I want to start with some verses from today's Colossian's reading.

Listen to what St Paul writes: **May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.**

St Paul here is sharing a prayer that he and his co-worker Timothy Pray on behalf of the Colossian Christians.

He is not telling them to *do* anything,
But letting them know how he speaks up for them to God,
And the gifts he asks God to give them.

It's like having a well-connected friend

Share with us how they speak up for us in our need:

Like the son of a business owner telling us how he's spoken up for us
As we are applying for a job at the man's business.

It would give us encouragement and confidence.

Then St Paul shares with us these words: **He [God the Father] has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**

Again, St Paul is not telling us to do anything,

Rather, he is reminding us of *what God has done for us* in Christ Jesus.

Let's pause here and think about the imagery.

First, it's imagery of God taking the initiative

Of God *rescuing* us from a power that keeps us in darkness.

It's possible that you've been rescued

From a dangerous or distressing situation,

And you know what it's like to be transferred from danger to safety,

Or from sickness to health, or from despair to hope.

God, St Paul says, has rescued us from the power of darkness:

From being controlled by forces we cannot see or understand,

From not knowing where we are going in life.

God has rescued us, and transferred us not to be subject to a *power*,

But to live as subjects in a *kingdom*, but with a different sort of *king*.

Today is Christ the King Sunday:

It's a day when we as church acknowledge and confess

That no merely human ruler is Lord of our lives –

Has the power to tell us who we are or what our future is.

Rather it is Christ Jesus, who was mocked, and spat upon,

Who was flogged and crowned with thorns,
Who was enthroned on the cross,
It is Christ Jesus who is our true king, our true Lord.
He has authority to give us status in the household of God,
And to bring us into the future that he creates.
So today is a day when confess that Jesus is Lord,
And we acknowledge that Jesus path to kingship,
Was not achieved through force or compulsion,
But through his sacrificial death,
A death that brought us into a kingdom where peace reigns.

This is how St Paul puts it in today's reading: **For in [Christ Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.**

So we Christians acknowledge that it is God who graciously
Brings us into his royal family, and who brings us peace through Jesus' blood,
Blood shed for the forgiveness of sins,
And shared to bring us peace with God and each other.

This confession of faith is at the heart of the Confirmation Rite today.
In a wedding a man and a woman vow to be faithfully to each other
As long as they both shall live.

Listen to the promises that are part of confirmation:

Since you are God's children through holy baptism, do you intend to listen to the preaching of God's word and to receive the supper of our Lord?

First there is the acknowledgement of belonging:
That in baptism we have already been transferred
From the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Son.
This is all gift.

Then there is the promise to live as children of the royal household
By receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit
As we hear God' word spoken to us,
And as we together receive the body and blood of Christ
Given and shed for us, to bring us peace.

In other words, we have encouragement to live with God
As people who receive what God has to give,
And to let God's Spirit shape our loves in love for each other,

So that we walk in the light of God.

There is one more promise that is part of the Confirmation Rite,
And here it is: ***Do you intend to remain faithful to the teaching of the Lutheran church, as you have learnt it from Martin Luther's Small Catechism?***

This second promise is really a way of affirming the first one:

The point is not that are loyal to Luther, but to Jesus.

Because if you to the Small Catechism, you read words like these:

Jesus rescued me when I was lost and sentenced to death. He set me free from all my sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. It cost him more than gold or silver; it cost him his life. Even though he was holy and innocent, he suffered and died for me. Jesus did this so that I can belong to him, and he can rule over me as my king. I can live under him and serve him, innocent and happy forever, just as he was raised to life, and lives and rules forever. This is certainly true.

Today is Christ the King Sunday,

Today we confess the true kingship of Christ,

Today we acknowledge that God has brought us into his kingdom,

Not because we have a claim to it, but because he is gracious,

And because Christ, who reigned from the cross,

Showed us that true authority reveals itself in a love

That is willing to suffer,

In a love that is stronger than death.

And today is Confirmation Sunday,

Where we who are baptised are free to reaffirm our promises to God,

And to receive again the word and the sacrament

Through which we receive the Holy Spirit of God,

And so are sustained in the life of faith and love.

It's a day when those who are not baptised,

Or who do not confess the faith,

Can consider what life with God looks like,

And what it means to respond to God's call to faith.

May God, who has rescued us from the power of darkness,

And transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son,

Keep us in faith and hope and love.

In Jesus' name. Amen.