

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Pentecost/Confirmation 2014
Titus 3:5-7¹

Part I

Nathan, this is *your* special day, your confirmation day. You wanted it. You worked hard to get to it. You took three years of confirmation classes; memorized the work given to you; did five oral exams all by yourself before the elders. Now, today, you are ready to be admitted as a communicant member.

As long as we are speaking of special days, I see that you have *another* special day coming up soon. It's your birthday. As it says in the bulletin, that day is June 23rd. You will be fourteen years old on that day.

I mention that because today we are remembering *another* birthday; the birthday of the Christian Church. It all happened fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead; and ten days after he ascended. At that time Jerusalem was filled with guests from Africa, Asia and Europe. They had come to celebrate Pentecost.

That day a terrific wind, sent from heaven, drew the attention of a large crowd. Curious to see what had happened, they went to the sight. There they saw a sight they had never seen. Tongues of fire sat on the disciples' heads. They heard words they never expected to hear; *their* native languages; languages from *far away* lands; languages the disciples *never* had a chance to learn.

That led the crowd to ask, "*How is it that we hear them in our own languages in which we were born?*"² They did *because* the Spirit was *poured out* on the disciples. As he was, they preached "the wonderful

1 References to the text (NKJV) will not be cited

2 Acts 2.8

works of God;”³ that Jesus had died, risen and ascended to heaven; that sin was paid for and heaven opened. The result was that on that day 3,000 were *baptized* into the Christian faith; and the Christian Church was born.

That reminds us of the most significant fact of your life, Nathan. You, too, have *another* birthday. It’s July 2nd - the day you were baptized. That day the Spirit was *poured out* on you; and, you were *born* as God's child. I want to talk about what that birthday means for you, today, and the rest of your life.

Part II

Life begins at some point in time. Let's take an example from a sport you enjoy, Nathan, with your grandpa. It is the sport of golf. Being a golfer, you go to the golf course. You play a round or two. You work at getting better. It happens, because at *some point* in your life a golf club was put in your hand. It was; and a golfer was born.

Life began for you at a point in time, too - on your birthday. Born on that day you were given life; and, you enjoy life – playing a round of golf, playing brass instruments, drawing pictures, etc. You have your life ahead of you to do that and more. As great as all that is, this life is *not* forever. While it may seem like a long way off, one day *it will* end in death. It will because sin has made its ugly mark. You, like each one of us here, were born dead in sin.

Born dead in sin, you needed to be born anew. The thing is, the sinful self *thinks* that we have *a part* in being born anew. It thinks we can make our selves over; make ourselves acceptable to God. We just have to do better; try harder; be the best we can be. No matter how hard we try, though, it doesn’t cut it. It's “*not* by works of righteousness we have done.” We can't make our sinful self over *any more* than you, Nathan, could make a decision to be born.

So, God, the Holy Spirit, had to give you a new birth. Our text calls it “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” In that washing you were born anew. It happened at this baptismal font. It did on the eighth day of your life. Here, the heavenly Father *poured out* the Spirit on you. He did as water was poured on your head with the word, baptizing you.

Baptized, *though* you were born a sinner, the Spirit *washed away* your sins. He did because that water is your *connection* to Jesus’ cross. It brought to you what Jesus won for you. Jesus won forgiveness for you. He did by dying in your place. Here, in your baptism, the Spirit gave that to you; here, born anew in Jesus, the Spirit wrapped you in Jesus’ righteous robe. It’s the robe Jesus spun for you by his perfect life. Wrapped in it, the Spirit presented you to your heavenly Father as his child; the Father took you in his arms; he gave you life eternal with him.

Part III

Of course, once life begins, there are hazards. It’s kind of like golf. As you play a round there are water traps, sand traps and thick rough. To begin with you might avoid the hazards. You have a nice tee off; great approach to the green; sink the put...but, then it happens. You have that bad shot. The ball slices into the rough; it falls short in the water or in a sand trap.

That’s how it is with the baptismal life. There are *hazards* as you walk in this world. Such hazards are the *sand-traps* of the devil’s lies; the *thick rough* of the world’s sinful ways; the *murky despair* at the bottom of water. The thing about hazards like these is that the sinful self is drawn to them. It *wants* to leave the fairway for the thick rough of sinful ways. It *despairs* of God because he lets bad things happen. It *prefers* the devils’ smooth sounding lies to what God has to say in his word.

When you get right down to it, though, these hazards are nothing but *trouble*. To be sure, they may have their appeal. Though they may, they are *tricks* of the devil. He uses them to rip you out of God’s hands.

That's where your baptism comes in. When you were baptized, God *marked* you. He marked you as his own. For that reason the *sign of the cross* was made over you when you were baptized. The sign of the cross was a message to the devil. That message was this, "Hands off! This one belongs to me. He is *my* child, paid for by my Son's blood."

When at times you *do* land in the hazards of life and get hurt by them, God is *always* waiting for you. At the baptismal font, he promised to wrap you again and again in his arms. He did because he looks at you cross-eyed. He sees your sin taken away at the cross in his Son's death. Taken away, you are loved by the Father. Loved by him, he keeps taking your hand in his to walk as his child; to avoid faith's hazards.

Part IV

To be sure, the hazards of life are ever present...just like in the life of the golfer. When you end up in hazards on the golf course, you need to return to the basics. It's what your golfing partner might tell you. He might say, "Make sure your stance is correct. Keep your head down. Follow through on the swing. Stick to the basics."

That is true for the baptismal life you are reaffirming today. As you go forward from your confirmation, you will need to stick to the basics – the basics at pulpit, altar and font. That simply means staying in God's word. The word gives you Jesus. It does because God *does not* want to lose you...*ever*. That is to say, you need Jesus all life long. You do, because you, like the rest of us, sin every day. If not dealt with, sin cuts us off from the Father and from his heaven. *Nothing* could be worse.

The only way to deal with sin, then, is Jesus. That's why the word gives you Jesus; why Jesus is preached from the pulpit. By it the Spirit returns you to the baptismal font. He buries your sin in Jesus' death. It is gone from you. He raises you in Jesus. You are alive in him; connected with the Father.

A special way God will keep you connected with him, now, is at the Lord's Supper. To come to it means you have to be prepared for it; and

you have been. You have been taught the chief parts of the catechism. What's more, after being examined, you been approved by the elders for admittance to the Lord's Supper.

So, here, at this altar, the Spirit will keep giving you Jesus. Here, he gives you Jesus' body broken for you in the bread; Jesus' blood shed for you in the cup. As he gives them to you he keeps you wrapped up in Jesus' righteous robe, dressed in the Father's best. Pull it tightly around you, until the Father, one day, brings you home to heaven.

Part V

Coming home, you could say, is kind of like finishing the last hole in golf. If you have any fans - family or friends - watching you play, that is where they will meet you. They show up at the last hole. They will cheer you on until the ball is sunk.

That's where the rest of us come in. You and I are here today to encourage Nathan in his baptismal faith; in the confirmation of that faith; in its end goal. You see, we are all in this thing together. Every one of us is a sinner; unworthy of God's love; saved only by God's mercy in Jesus. It is the mercy shown at the cross; poured out on us in the word; given to us in the Father's "only-begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."⁴

So, today, we celebrate with you, Nathan. We rejoice that the Spirit is at work, confirming the faith given at your baptism. That's the miracle of Pentecost. It is the miracle of God, the Spirit, working *through* the word. By means of it, **the Spirit will keep you in your baptismal faith; an heir of heaven.** Amen!

⁴ John 3:16