

## RECOMMITMENT AND CONFIRMATION SUNDAY

September 26, 2021

St. John's Lutheran Church, Grove City OH

[Traditional]

After such a strange, frustrating couple of years for so many of us, we've set this month of September aside to think and pray about our life together as God's people here at St. John's. With so much conflict in the world, it's crucial to remember who we serve and who we are. Now that it's the end of the month, we have an opportunity today to reaffirm the covenant that God has made with us in baptism, and recommit ourselves to worship and ministry in Jesus' name.

Along with our recommitment, seven young women of St. John's will be confirmed [\*\*\*] at the 11:00 service. They'll be publicly affirming their baptisms. It's a perfect weekend for all of us to hear and remember those commitments we made at our confirmation.

The first two commitments go together: we commit ourselves to live among God's faithful people and to hear God's Word and share in his supper. Obviously I'm preaching to the choir here. It's what we're doing right now. But we should be aware that there are a lot of forces working to drive believers away from the basics of fellowship and worship. For one thing, false gods of our current culture are getting into many congregations right now. Sometimes it's religious leaders who are putting false gods at the center—it might be their brand of politics, it might be their particular angle on social issues. And it's a disaster. These are broken gods created by broken human beings. We will never be able to come together around human politics and social issues that are themselves products of human sin. But we can't just blame religious leaders for setting those false gods on the altars of their congregations. All of us here—since we know the crucified and risen Jesus—have the responsibility to not allow those false gods to divide us as God's people.

When we allow those false gods to take the place of our Lord Jesus Christ who speaks to us through scripture, it means we've sold out to the world. We've become humanists. Instead of seeing God at the center of everything, we see humanity at the center of everything. As humanists, we think we can accurately comprehend and judge every situation, and that we have the answers to all problems within ourselves. When I start believing that, and things don't go my way, I start blaming other human beings for everything. This is one of the reasons people are turning away—canceling—God's Church these days. People are choosing the false god of humanism over the cross of Jesus Christ. As a humanist, I'm looking for a group of people that fits...me. I'll be waiting for a church that agrees with my politics. I'll be waiting for a church where everyone behaves as they should, according to me. I'll be waiting for a long time. And the other side of that same humanist coin is all those people out there who are saying, "I'll never join a club that would accept ME as a member."

When everything we do starts and ends with human beings, when we think church is something that fits in with our schedule, when we think faith is only about bringing us happiness, when we replace salvation with human fulfillment, when we replace the kingdom of God with a worldly political vision, all we'll end up doing is comparing ourselves with

other broken human beings all the time. We'll always be riding that rollercoaster between self-righteousness at the top and feeling worthless at the bottom. It's a dead-end ride.

God's Church is where sinners can leave that circus ride behind, and gather together around Jesus Christ. We can bow down in humble gratitude to the One who lifts us up so we can live, not on that wheel of death and selfishness, but for him and for his beautiful purpose. I've never been so thankful for God's Church in my life, as I have been this past year. Because in the middle of the circus and the noise where everyone is trying to out-shout the next person, you and I can come here and beg God for forgiveness, and admit we're broken, that we don't see everything straight, that we don't have the answers. We can come here together and repent and admit our weakness and vulnerability and our limitations, and we can do it—not because we're particularly great people—but because we know and trust WHO GOD IS: the one who sent his only Son to die for us so that we can have life in him. In his forgiveness, we can start over with each other. We can move on from the wheel of death. We need this to be part of our lives. The Body of Christ. The fellowship, the living word, the sacraments. Not just the idea of Christ. We need the body of Christ.

The other three confirmation commitments go together: *to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.* These three are about us going out towards the wider world our neighbors as ambassadors for Jesus. One of my favorite sayings has always been, "Actions speak louder than words." But lately, it's become really clear: we need to learn to talk more confidently about Jesus. In the current environment where it's hard to trust words anymore, we believers need to root all our words in the first Word—the Word who became flesh. We need to talk about Jesus with people. Talking about the faith can be hard for Lutherans. We kind of have a reputation for not bothering anyone. But when we don't talk about Jesus, we run the risk that people will perceive the Church as just another soup kitchen. Soup kitchens are good, because they feed hungry people, and God wants people fed. But what makes a church? A church will add the verbal, public proclamation that Jesus Christ is Lord to every spoonful of soup it serves. Without that public proclamation, however good our intentions might be, however nice and loving we are, we won't look much different than any other group out there, doing good. Church is where we learn to openly speak the faith. Think of our small groups, think of the faith webbing that our youth ministers do with our young people. By engaging in conversation centered in Christ, by engaging in those relationships of trust with other believers, we are learning to speak the name of Jesus honestly and confidently. And that's not for us...that's for going out into the world as his ambassadors.

Finally: we commit to working for peace and justice, and to serving others in imitation of Christ. When people are being treated like they're worthless, when we see people hungry or alone or poor, we believers don't wait for someone else to respond. We don't let anybody else's actions determine what we do or don't do. We take our cues from our Lord Jesus. We want to reflect his compassion and care and concern for every individual we come across. We are responsible for God's children throughout the world. We will refuse to let anybody take that responsibility away from us...or the joy that comes with serving.

So in a minute, we'll recommit ourselves to our purpose as God's Church. I hope it's clear—I probably should have brought it up—that we're not saving ourselves here. Through Jesus Christ, you and I have been given a permanent place in God's household. That's his baptismal promise to us. And like a good father, he'll keep on putting these five challenges in front of us. He'll keep reminding us: When we do these things, we're not gaining our lives. We're just being salty, to use Jesus' expression. We're just showing who we belong to.

So we commit ourselves to these Church behaviors with confidence. What a privilege we have to say publicly that "Jesus is Lord." There are a lot of false gods out there; sometimes saying "Jesus is Lord" is going to bring us pain. But what a gift God has given us: we see this new life—a life we would never see unless he gave it to us. And we can actually turn to it, and live it, and be salt for the world, ambassadors of Jesus' love to the people around us. He has saved us. Praise God! We cannot add anything to what he has done for us. We can just let his light shine.