

Sermon for Confirmation Sunday—Nov. 16, 2025

Isaiah 9:1-7

John 8:12

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We speak often in the church of the great cloud of witnesses that surround us and stand as examples in the life of faith for us. The month of November has provided us with a lovely overview of the life of faith. On All Saints Sunday we remembered that cloud of saints and gave thanks for the privilege of growing up surrounded by so many faithful people who believed in Jesus: his life, his death, and his resurrection.

Just two days ago, on November 14 we held the funeral for Dale Anderson here in this sanctuary and remembered the promises of God. Again we affirmed our belief in Jesus: his life, his death, and his resurrection.

Today we will be witnesses as three young women affirm their faith in Jesus: his life, his death, and his resurrection. They will affirm that they believe in the promises of Jesus their savior,

And next Sunday morning we will witness the baptism of baby Hazel Catherine as she is sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ, forever. Her parents will hold faith for her until she is old enough to affirm it for herself.

In each of these situations we are witnesses to God's grace at work as God claims each of the people that we name before him: whether it is Dale Anderson, Marissa Mandelkow, Kennedy McCann, Bella Otto, or baby Hazel. They are claimed by God and loved by God. And so are you!

It's a remarkable thing to consider how the church and faith and the Holy Spirit weave their way through all of these milestones of life. Birth, and adolescence, and death.

But all of these milestones and life events would have little meaning if it were not for the one to whom we always point: Jesus. In **John 8:12** Jesus spoke, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

It is because of Jesus that those who are mourning the loss of a loved one can find a little bit of light in the world. It is because of his promise that when we follow him we will have the light (and hope) of life.

It is because of Jesus that those who are struggling: whether it is serious illness, financial difficulties, loss of a job, marital challenges, you name it: it is because of Jesus that we can find a little bit of light in the world. It is because of his promise that we can set aside our trials and tribulations for just a moment and sense his light of life, however faint it might be. Not because Jesus promises to make our life easy and without challenge: no it doesn't work that way. But when we follow Jesus there will always be a little bit of light that we can look to. *(Pause)*

Let's consider the reading from Isaiah for a moment. Isaiah was a prophet living in difficult times. Assyria was rising as a military power at the time that his/these words were spoken. There was fear that Israel would be overrun by foreign invaders. His prophecy brought hope to the people. His words surely rang out:

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

As the ancient Israelites listened to Isaiah's words, they thought he was predicting an earthly king. They heard these words and imagined a baby being born to royalty in a palace who would become a savior for the country and protect them from the Assyrian threat. Historians are not confident that a child was born as predicted. But we are not living in ancient Israel. So how can this text have any relevance in our lives?

For roughly the first 50 years after Jesus ascended to heaven the early Christian's Bible consisted of only the Old Testament—the Jewish Scriptures. In faith they continued to read their Bible and as they did so they saw it in a new light. They recognized the many verses that pointed to a coming Savior and took these verses from Isaiah and applied them directly to Jesus. Jesus was the wonderful counselor. He was the Son of God. They affirmed that Jesus continues to live and sit at the right hand of God. He is the everlasting—ever living one. And Jesus taught his followers a vastly different way of living on earth: a peace filled way that made sure that all were adequately fed and clothed. That the sick were cared for and didn't die alone. That the needs of those in prison were

filled. For early Christians trusting that Jesus was the one that Isaiah referred to was integral to their faith.

My friends, we are living in interesting and challenging times. There are powers in the world that are desperately trying to draw us away from following Jesus who is the one true God and Savior of the world. We are called today to turn aside from following the powers of the world and to keep our eyes on the light of the world. Who would that be? Jesus, of course. Now it's one thing to say, "Keep your eyes on Jesus" and another to actually live that way in this world. What are the actions that we can take to keep our eyes on Jesus? The actions are not difficult but they do take discipline.

Nearly every confirmation student that I have been teaching this fall: meaning all of the 7th, 8th, and 9th graders are participating in sports. Their coaches emphasize that in order to improve they have to practice: practice the stances and techniques that have been proven to help a person succeed at their chosen sport. One of the ideas behind practice is that you gain muscle memory; that your body knows how to move to accomplish a bump, set, spike in volleyball, how to dribble and perform a layup in basketball, how to field a fly ball; how to move in a dance routine; you get the idea....

Now, you may be asking yourselves what does sports practice have to do with keeping one's eyes on Jesus. The short answer is practice. By consistently developing a habit of Bible reading, by disciplining oneself to spend some time in prayer every day, by making a habit of gathering for worship with other followers of Jesus; these are the keys to keeping one's eyes on Jesus. Those of us who have made a few more trips around the sun than our children, grand-children, and for some of us, our great-grandchildren, we know that faith in Jesus has made our lives easier—especially when the hard times come or difficult stuff happens in our lives.

We gather here today to worship. We gather to receive holy Communion and the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. We gather to witness that we believe in God, father, son, and holy Spirit. We gather because in doing so we participate in a rite that has been going on for hundreds of years: the passing on of the faith to the next generation. We gather to participate in the passing down of faith.

Grandparents: just because your grandchildren have affirmed their faith doesn't mean that your job is done. Your exhibitions of faith in the face of adversity will continue to be important for as long as you draw breath.

Parents, you are well aware that the task of nurturing your children is far from over. Don't stop now! And to every person sitting here whether you are related to these young women or not: you are part of that great cloud of witnesses. God's grace fills you and sustains you. God's love for you continues unabated every day. You are the beloved of God. Amen.