

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes  
for Sunday, 23 May

## Children's Talk: Growing in the Lord's Spirit

Last week there was a baptism. Water was poured on a child's head as a reminder of the way the Lord washes away evil from a person when they follow Him. Mr. Smith talked about how this is not something that we can see: you cannot just look at someone and know if they were ever baptised. But you can look at how they live, and know from that what kind of person they are and how they are choosing to follow the Lord.

This is a process that takes a long time. It takes a lifetime in fact. We as adults are all working on it too. We don't really ever finish. But we can get better. As we grow older, we can grow under the guidance of the Lord's spirit, so that we can become more and more like Him. Jesus showed us this in His own life:

**Luke 2:39** So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

**Luke 2:41** His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup> And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. <sup>43</sup> When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; <sup>44</sup> but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. <sup>45</sup> So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. <sup>46</sup> Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. <sup>48</sup> So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously."

**Luke 2:49** And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.

**Luke 2:51** Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Jesus grew in the Lord's spirit. He became more and more loving and wise. That wasn't something that happened once when He was a baby. Nor was it something that He finished right away. But He kept growing, as a teenager, so that even the elders in the temple were amazed at the questions He asked.

You also can be growing in the Lord's spirit. You probably don't remember your baptism. And you won't be finished growing for years. But right now, you can still be growing in the Lord's spirit. How do you make sure? You can't just say, "I was baptised, I'll grow automatically." And you also can't say, "I'll grow when I'm an adult." You also don't become perfect overnight.

But what you can do is every day ask, "How can I be a little better than yesterday? How can I act a little more like the Lord? How can I learn a little bit more of the Lord's teachings than I knew yesterday?"

You are not anywhere close to being done. But by growing a little everyday, when you are an adult, you will have gotten so far.

# Confirmation of Baptism

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

23 May, 2021

Last week we witnessed a baptism in church. Baptism is the beginning of a lifelong spiritual journey, all the more so when it is done in infancy. It marks an entrance into the Christian church and an introduction to the Lord. It also sets the stage for a life of regeneration. Yet in all of these things it is only the very beginning. The further we move through life the further behind our baptism becomes. For those of us baptised as infants it is so far back that we have no memory of it. And even for those of us baptised as adults, it may still be a distant memory. Who you were when you were baptised is very different from who you are today. So how do we bring that distant event into our present lives? How do we discover, or rediscover, the significance of that commitment? That is our subject today.

The fact that we want to reaffirm our baptism makes a lot of sense. As we have grown our beliefs and practices have grown along with us. We want to be able to both cement the promises made at baptism originally as well as perhaps imbue them with new meaning and understanding. It reminds me of the renewal of wedding vows: as a couple has matured, what their marriage means to them has changed as well. Along the way they will have had their fair share of hard times and doubts in the strength or purpose of their marriage. In renewing their vows they reaffirm their commitment to each other and to the future of their marriage.

That being said, when it comes to reaffirming baptism there is another aspect to consider: the fact that if you were baptised as a child you had no choice in the matter. You could neither reject nor accept it. Your baptism said far more about your parents than it did about you. And even when someone is baptised as an adult, there is no way that in that moment they can know where their faith will lead them. Again, baptism is an introduction and a beginning.

For these reasons, various churches have come up with a service called "confirmation." In a confirmation service an adult is asked similar questions to the ones asked at baptism. This service is a way for someone to confirm that yes, those promises of baptism, to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, to have faith in Him, and to live a good life, rejecting evil, reflect their own intentions. Confirmation is a way of publicly declaring that you are not a member of the church because of who your parents were or because of how you were raised; you are a member of the church of your own freewill and choice. And it is a way to affirm that even if perhaps you have strayed from the flock in the past, you are committed now in the present to what baptism represents.

A public declaration of faith can be powerful both for the speaker and the listeners. But it can also become a distraction from real ways of confirming baptism. Jesus told a story that should make us wary of putting too much faith in public declarations of faith:

"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?"

They said to Him, "The first."

Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.” (Matthew 21:28-32)

A person who is baptised, and then confirms their baptism verbally, and even goes through the process of a confirmation ceremony, but then lives contrary to the Lord’s teachings, has done nothing to actually confirm their faith. Likewise, a person who has never even been baptized, or one who in their youth rejected their faith, but then goes on to live the Lord’s teachings, has truly confirmed his faith. For verbal confirmation to be meaningful it must be lived.

The truth of the matter is that living your faith confirms it far more than anything else you could do. In fact, it’s not just living your faith, but having your lived faith put into question and challenged what will in the end confirm it. This is illustrated in an interesting story from the book of Exodus, a story about the Egyptians trying to snuff out the Israelites living in their land:

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor. (Exodus 1:8-14)

The Egyptians planned to crush the Israelites through hard labour and slavery. But the plan backfired. Instead of weakening the Israelites, the more they were afflicted, the more they grew stronger. Now that does not mean that the Israelites flourished. They suffered greatly for centuries. But in the end the hardship strengthened them.

We experience a similar process when our faith is put under attack. When faith is under assault, we are given an opportunity to fight back, and in the process strengthen and grow in faith. It’s comparable to how putting muscles under strain breaks them down so that they can heal back stronger than before. The Teaching of the New Church lay out how this takes place in our spiritual lives:

When this is being done, not only are the truths and goods strengthened which had been implanted before, but more are instilled; this being the result of every spiritual combat in which the combatant is victorious. That it is so is also plain from common experience; for he who defends his opinion against others who attack it, confirms himself the more in his opinion, and then also finds other confirmations of it which he had not before observed, and also others which deny the opposite; and in this way he strengthens himself in his opinion, and also illustrates it with further considerations. This is still more perfectly the case with spiritual combats, because the combat takes place in the spirit, and has to do with goods and truths; and especially because the

Lord is present and leads by the angels; for the contest is concerning eternal life and salvation. (*Secrets of Heaven* §6663)

You've probably been on the other side of this equation: you attack someone's opinion, you list all the reasons they're wrong, you provide overwhelming evidence in your own favour, and yet they simply dig their heels in and believe their own opinion ten times more strongly than they did before. As frustrating as this experience is to have, it is hugely beneficial when what someone is defending is good and true.

In this case the plan of the hells to tear down someone's faith backfires completely. In the end, by attacking us and trying to make us doubt, they instead confirm our faith for us. Take for example someone who has experienced the death of a loved one and so begins to doubt the Lord's Providence. He rages against the Lord at first demanding answer. Why does a loving God allow that? And then further doubts creep in, doubts about the purpose of life or the existence of an afterlife. Yet in spite of these doubts he perseveres. He continues to strive to live for others, to find purpose in his work, to live as if there were hope when he feels none. Some days of course he'll give in to the doubts and become bitter or resentful. And even still, on the whole, he struggle to find his way back to the Lord. When he comes through, or perhaps the moments when he comes through, confirm his faith more strongly in the Lord than ever before. Faith is confirmed in the times of greatest struggle and doubt, and when the storm fades it is stronger than ever. The Lord prepared us for this in His words to Simon Peter shortly before the Crucifixion. Simon stands for faith, and yet the Lord knew His faith would soon be sorely tested:

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." (Luke 22:31-32)

We all go through our own traumas and crises. Yet far from being signs of weakness, when we have returned to the Lord, we can strengthen our brethren.

There is one last part of confirmation that I want to mention. Last week we witnessed a baptism. But we also had a chance to take part in Holy Supper. These two sacraments go hand in-hand. Just as Baptism is an introduction to the Lord and the church, Holy Supper is the confirmation and coming to maturity of that introduction. Even in the differences in the ceremonies we see a kind of maturity: baptism is done to someone: the water is poured on, symbolically washing away uncleanness. But in Holy Supper, the person themselves takes something in: the bread and wine are ingested, the nutrients absorbed into the body and becoming part of the person.

Every time that we take Holy Supper it is a confirmation that the Lord, along with His love and His wisdom are becoming part of ourselves. More than that it is a confirmation that love and wisdom are becoming our own. They are not just ideas taught by others by conscious parts of who we are and the choices we make. In taking Holy Supper we declare or confirm that we intend to make the Lord part of our lives. His love becomes our love, His wisdom becomes our wisdom.

If you want to recommit to the Lord, to make your faith your own, or to even to strengthen your wavering faith, take advantage of Holy Supper when it is offered. The next opportunity at New Church Westville will be in June.

Of course, you don't have to wait for Holy Supper or to do a confirmation service. If you want to confirm your faith, start living it. Start fighting for it. Start making a change based on what the Lord teaches. Your efforts will confirm that you are indeed committed to the promise of baptism: a life of following the Lord.