

"Between 'Once upon a time' and 'They lived happily ever after'"
Acts 2:42

10 April Anno Domini 2005
Easter 3 -- Confirmation of
Chelsey, Stephanie, Joey, Sierra and Danielle
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

May God's grace, mercy and peace ever be yours in the Name of the LORD our God - in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear Danielle, Chelsey, Stephanie, Joey and Sierra,

"Once upon a time" is how many fine stories begin and we follow the story closely to find out whether or not those within the story "lived happily ever after." Some of the stories are fairy tales and some of them are true. Here's one that is true . . . it actually is a part of history.

Once upon a time God created time, the heavens and the earth on one day, and male and female He created on another day - and behold all was good, and Adam and Eve were perfect. However, within that once upon a time, sin entered the world and death through sin. In order that man be not lost forever in hell, but would be able to live happily ever after in the LORD's Presence, God sent His only- and eternally-begotten Son to be the Savior of the world - to be born in Bethlehem, to live some thirty years, to fulfill the Law perfectly, to die on the cross, paying for the sins of all people, including those assembled here on your confirmation day. Three days later Jesus rose again from the dead - victorious over death and the grave. He did this that all may believe in Him - namely, the Gospel, the Good News of the forgiveness of all sins by the grace of God through faith in Christ.

Once upon a time God created you - giving you your body and soul, eyes, ears and all your members, your reason and all your senses, and still preserves them. In addition, within that once upon a time, God re-created you in Holy Baptism - giving you the forgiveness of all your sins, eternal life and salvation, and the gift of faith to trust in Christ, and still preserves you in the one, true faith. This is the Christian faith that was confessed the day you were baptized and this is the Christian faith that you are confessing today.

Now, as far as I know, not everyone in any story that begins with "Once upon a time" actually "lives happily ever after." That's because, as the story goes along, some people end up not living happily ever after. In the stories that are fiction we think of the Wicked Witch of the West, MacBeth, Lord Farquaad, Jaffar, and Gollum. In true history those who did not live happily ever after include King Saul, Lucifer, the children of Korah, and Judas Iscariot. Such good beginnings to these stories and such tragic endings for these characters in the tales and people on the stage of history. What took place that caused them to fall? What could have taken place to prevent it? Or, of primary importance to you and to each one here this morning, what needs to happen so that you may live happily ever after?

Please listen to the answer that the Bible gives in Acts 2:42, doing so under the theme of . . .

"Between 'Once Upon A Time' and 'They Lived Happily Ever After'"

"And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine and the Fellowship, in the Breaking of Bread and the Prayers."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Those who congregated in the days of old, when Peter proclaimed the message of Christ crucified for the sins of the world and Jesus risen from the dead, were just as determined as to remain faithful as you are today, Stephanie, Joey, Sierra, Chelsey and Danielle. They heard the Word of God's Law that accused the old Adam within and they confessed their sin and their inability to save themselves. Then they heard the Gospel - the Good News of forgiveness, eternal life and salvation through Jesus the Christ. As a result, they were a determined lot. They would remain steadfast in this Word of God and would do so in order to be a part of those people, who, at the end of the story, would live happily ever after.

To do that, the Bible tells us that they devoted themselves to certain holy things and activities so that they wouldn't fall away from the Truth and not live happily ever after. As a group, just as you are a confirmation class, they were determined to suffer all things, even death, rather than fall away from the Christian faith. Hear what those four holy things and activities consisted of, that are beneficial devotions.

First, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ... to the doctrine that had been given to them by Christ through the ministry of the Word. Even though they had learned that the difference between the Law and the Gospel, even though they believed that they were saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus Who died on the cross to take away their sins, even though they rejoiced at the Christmas Birth and the Easter Resurrection of the Incarnate Son of God, they realized that they needed to continue to learn.

It's like you, who, though having gone through more than a decade of Sunday School, a lifetime of being in Church and now three years of confirmation class, you need to hear more and continue to devote yourself to doctrine ... to the teachings of the Bible.

Second, they devoted themselves to the fellowship ... to the confession of the faith that they had in common and expressed together as a congregation. They would not join in with what the Herodians believed; they would not go to the communion of false churches; they would drink the cup of demons. Likewise, that early congregation would not permit the Herodians or other religious people to come to the Lord's Supper there. Agreement in doctrine must come first; then there could be the fellowship of the faith.

It's like you, who, having had the basics in doctrine, now, here today, confirm this confession of the faith and devote yourselves - as a congregation - to the confession of the faith that the Scriptures proclaim and teach.

Third, they devoted themselves to the Breaking of Bread ... to the Lord's Supper. First came doctrine and then came fellowship. With these two established, then they came to the Sacrament of the Altar together. Having learned what they hoped to receive in the Lord's Supper, namely the very Body and Blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and the wine, and having learned why they were

coming, namely for the forgiveness of sins, and having made the confession of this Holy Communion, they were prepared to come to the Lord's Table for the Breaking of Bread ... for the Body and Blood of Christ.

It's like you, who are prepared to come to the Lord's Supper for the first time today. You know what you are about to receive and why you are coming. When invited to another table, for example, at a Baptist or a Romanist Church, you will politely say, "No thank you" to the invitation. That's just good Table manners. Likewise those of other denominations will want to refrain from coming to Communion here. Why? Well, for one thing, the Lord's Supper is a statement that a person agrees with what we believe, teach and confess. For another, it would not be good for them if they weren't properly prepared. Or, according to the order of our sermon text, first comes the Apostles' Doctrine, then comes the Confession of Fellowship, and then comes the Breaking of Bread.

Fourth, they devoted themselves to the prayers ... not to just any old prayers to any old god; but to THE prayers to the LORD God. For centuries the Church has said her prayers to the one true God. What prayers? Well, prayers like these:

"O Almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor miserable sinner, confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities ... and I pray Thee ... for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Thy Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor miserable being."

Or this prayer that is chanted, "Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us."

Or this prayer that is sung, "O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us."

Or this prayer, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant, depart in peace, according to Thy Word."

"And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine and the Fellowship, in the Breaking of Bread and the Prayers."

And did they all do this, and did they all remain steadfast, coming to the Divine Service every week in order to receive all the blessings that the Lord wanted them to have? Did they come every Sunday to be at the Lord's Table, and did they all live happily ever after? No, and that is sad and that is a tragic ending to the story.

It's like you, who, even though are here today and making the good confession of the faith, are already starting not to devote yourselves to what is good for you and the eternity that is ahead of you. This happens when you get careless and over-confident; when you follow the example or temptations of others. Sports and clubs and other activities become more important and so you miss confirmation class and Sunday School and the Divine Service. It happens once, then it happens twice, and then it becomes a habit. Then you show up only at Christmas, or on Easter, or you reluctantly drag yourself to church on a Sunday when someone you know is being confirmed. And as a result, sometime between "Once upon a time" and "They lived happily ever after" you are gone

and you miss out on the end of the Story.

May God grant that you be like Edmund and Eustace in the Chronicles of Narnia in the world of fiction, and like King David, the Apostle Paul, the prodigal son and the woman at the well in the real world, who fell away, repented of their sin, heard the Word that they were, in the Name of the LORD, that is, in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit, forgiven of all their sins, and then they continued on their way to the end of their days.

How did the faithful members of the New Testament Church do this? Simple. "And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine and the Fellowship, in the Breaking of Bread and the Prayers."

And when did they do this? Easy. They did this "Between 'Once upon a time' and 'They lived happily ever after.'"

May it be so for you ... Chelsey, Joey, Danielle, Sierra and Stephanie, and also for all of you who are here this day. Amen.