

## "No Matter What!" -- Acts 4:8-12

On the occasion of the Confirmation of the Christian Faith by  
Tana Fraser, Willy Matton, Jeremiah Spaude, Cory Lankford  
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Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho  
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace ever be yours – in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized – especially you: Tana, Miah, Cory and Willy,

When people use the phrase, “No Matter What,” it is an expression of sincerity, determination and purpose. “I don’t care where you are, what time of day or night it is, if you need anything, you let me know. I’m here to help. Do you understand? Anytime. Anyplace. Anything. No matter what. Got it? . . . Got it?” . . . “Yes, got it!”

Sincerity. Determination. Purpose. People who get married, sincerely promise and resolutely determine to remain with one another, as husband and wife until death – to stay with each other for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and health, in good times and in bad. No matter what.

A child gets ready to leave home. A loving parent might say, “Always remember” (hey, it could happen!) always remember dat you canna come home, dat the door she’s ah unlocked for you and dat I love you, no matter vat; and dat the Lord He ah loves us both. Got it? . . . Got it?” . . . “Yes, got it!”

Confirmation Sunday is like that – not so much with the expressions of sincerity, determination and purpose, wherein we are telling God that He can count on us, but rather, listening to Him in His Word as He speaks to us with His truth and love, and perceiving His determination to be our God. Therefore, I invite you to listen to the Word of God given to us from a preacher’s mouth and inscribed for us by the physician’s hand; specifically when the Lord spoke through Peter’s sermon and as recorded by Luke in Acts 4:8-12 – with our hearing being focused on the theme . . .

. . . “No Matter What!”

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom you crucified, Whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man is standing before you well. This is the Stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the Head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’”

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

Did you catch what Peter is saying to the entire congregation and to each hearer of the Word here preached in its truth and purity. No matter what, you crucified Christ. Oh, it may have been corrupt church leaders who schemed to kill Jesus – a Judas traitor who betrayed Him – a Roman governor who ordered His execution – a posted soldier who nailed Him to the cross – an armed man who speared Him; but it was you who crucified the Lord God. Law or Gospel? Right, Law and the Law of the Christ always accuses our old sinful nature.

Your sins caused Jesus to become greatly burdened under the awful load of suffering and Divine sorrow. Why did He do this? He did it for the world because Jesus is "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), and He did for the world, He did for you. The LORD God's mercy, benevolence, grace, pity, and love for you was so great as to move Him to leave heaven and come here into this world of pain, woe and death, and what He did for you, He did for the world. In other words, my little children, I am preaching "this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). Jesus has paid the eternal price for all sins of all people of all times, no matter what. Law or Gospel? Right, Gospel and the Gospel of Jehovah always comforts the penitent child of God.

So there you've got Law and there you've got Gospel. Sermon over? No. Rather it's now time to revisit Law and Gospel, the two most important doctrines in Christianity. There are a couple reasons why this must be done; namely, vocation and reception, for these continue until the end of your days in the here and now.

Let's take vocation first. Why? Because vocation is of the Law and the pastor is called to preach and teach the Word of God. It is a part of his Call to properly distinguish Law and Gospel. If he doesn't do this, then the pastor has sinned for he has transgressed the Law. Then the pastor needs to repent of his sin and be forgiven and that forgiveness is the Gospel. So there's Law and there's Gospel – vocation and reception, and in that order. Moses comes before Jesus, for "the Law was given through Moses; Grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17); and John the Baptist precedes Jesus the Christ, just as the Law prepares the way of and for the Gospel.

But what of your vocation – or vocations, for they are many? There's being a mom or a dad. There's being a son or a daughter. Each one of us is a citizen and there are responsibilities that we have by virtue of our vocation as citizen. The same could be said of a student and a teacher, a parishioner and a pastor, an overseer and an undertaker, a butcher, a baker, a candle-stick maker. There's the vocation of being a catechist – a vocation that requires me to teach this and explain that, and to do it perfectly, no matter what. There's the calling to be a catechumen – a vocation that requires you to memorize this and to work on that, and to do it perfectly, every time, no matter what.

Have we done this perfectly? No. I've not been a perfect pastor – far, far from it, as I'm painfully aware. If we are blessed to have him come here, I can tell you right now, Pastor Reeder won't be a perfect pastor or a perfect confirmation teacher. Have you perfectly fulfilled your calling as grandmother or father or mother or member of the community. Have you – Tana, Willy, Miah and Cory – have you perfectly fulfilled your vocation as a catechumen? Nope, everyone of you has fallen short. There is none that has done it perfectly; no, not one.

Now, let's ponder these vocations alongside the first three Commandments. Oh, and we begin moaning already! The Almighty LORD God declares first, "Thou shalt have no other gods before

Me.” What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things. In a few minutes, I’m going to ask you a First Commandment question: “Do you also, as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, and suffer all even death, rather than fall away from it?” (Rite of Confirmation, The Lutheran Agenda, p. 24) That’s just like saying, “Is the LORD your God, no matter what?”

There on Mt. Sinai, “written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18) the eternal Son of God – the Christ – etched the Second Commandment onto the stone tablet, “Thou shalt not take the Name of the LORD your God in vain.” What’s so special about the Name of the LORD God? Peter says that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” – no matter what – “that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Jehovah, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

The third Word engraved into the stone by the Rock of Ages is “Thou shalt remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.” So, do you intend to continue fearing and loving God so that you do not despise God’s Word and the preaching of the same, but deem it holy and gladly hear and learn it, and suffer all, even the loss of snow sledding, NASCAR racing, and sporting tournaments, rather than falling away from hearing the Gospel?

That Gospel - that Good News - you really ought to hear right about now in this sermon. That means that as the Law leads us to the Gospel, so also vocation points us to reception, so also confirmation precedes and leads to Communion. Confirmation is not an end, but that which points to a greater receiving. Thus, Cory, Willy, Miah and Tana, it’s all about reception. God has gifts earned by Christ when He died on the cross for all sins and then rose again from the dead. Then these gifts are given by the Holy Spirit through His Word. All grace.

Jesus wants you here to receive His gifts of forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. God has called you to be His own and declared that He has chosen you. The first time that you were brought into Church, it was for the Lord to receive you into His Presence and to give you the gift of His Word of salvation. He received you in Holy Baptism and called you His own. So, no matter what, you are baptized.

The LORD God Almighty invites you into His Holy Presence every Sunday and no matter what you have done, He grants peace to your sorry soul and cleanses you in His Word. You have already heard it this morning with Jesus’ gift in the Absolution of all your sins, which, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, have been forgiven. Those who are not here don’t hear that Word of Christ. They are rejecting their Baptismal grace and placing their souls in eternal peril by neglecting the invitation to be in the Divine Service, for it is most certainly true that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

You have listened to sermons – a sermon being an extended Absolution in which you hear both Law and Gospel applied to the repentant sinner. Then there are those preparations for worthy communing at the Lord’s Supper. Our confirmands were to answer one question in particular – a question born from the loving, pastoral, Biblical practice of closed Communion. What do you intend to receive at the Lord’s Supper?

While all four of our confirmands got the answer on the first or second try, one answer was one of the most profound answers I've ever received. What do you intend to receive at the Lord's Supper? Answer: "the Body and Blood of God for the forgiveness of sins."

So now – Tana, Miah, Willy and Cory – you are prepared to receive "the Body and Blood of God for the forgiveness of your sins." The Table is set, and as you received the entire Christ in Baptism (The Large Catechism, Baptism, para. 41), you will receive no less in the Lord's Supper – for here, following the Words of Institution, no matter what, you will receive the Body and the Blood of Jesus. For those who come to the Holy Supper, knowing why they are communing and what they hope to receive there are abundant blessings.

So now – all of you and every one of you – you have heard that you are a sinner, that you have broken God's Law and, no matter what, you can't earn heaven by your own efforts, good works or deeds. You have also heard that Jesus – true God and true man – died for all your sins, no matter what, and that He rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven and is with you always, even to the end. And then, at some point, you became convinced that "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." And you, dearly beloved – now believing this Good News – may also now know, believe and trust that, "No Matter What," you are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.