**Philippians 2:5-11 April 10, 2022 (Palm Sunday and Confirmation 2022)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Epistle lesson, Philippians 2:5-11 here re-reading these words. “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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 Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ but especially to you the Confirmands of 2022,

In the grand scheme of our culture it’s safe to say that reality television is here to stay. Even though so much of reality television has nothing to do with actual reality and is quite scripted and manipulated to show what the producers want to show and want for us the audience to see, the main theme of most reality television shows, especially the ones that are competitions are rather simple stories. Regular people, just like you and just like me, are given the chance to find love, become millionaires, become dancing superstars, becoming singing superstars, become cooks, become artists, become rich, become well……anything. The one thing that all these shows have in common is that they give a person a chance, a chance to finally make something of themselves. To throw off the shackles of their humility and humble beginnings and finally be exalted and adored as the star that they truly are, all they have to do is, well, win. Be the best, beat the others, prove themselves. Sing the best, dance the best, answer the most questions, bake the best cake or food, whatever they had to do in this competition they had to do it the best. And then, in their mundane normal lives, they would finally have a chance to be recognized. This would be their moment of exaltation.

Which may be the temptation that you Confirmands are feeling this morning, as in just a few short moments you will come forward and be confirmed in the Christian faith. That this is finally your moment to shine. Everything big in your lives of instruction is behind you, the examination is done, the essay has been written and read, the memory work has been learned, the cake is downstairs all ready to be cut for your big party, you will get to partake of Holy Communion for the first time today. This is the day you finally get to make something of yourselves and graduate into the upper tier of Christianity. Where you get to be up here with the rest of us superstars of the faith.

If that is what you’re thinking, I’ve got some bad news. The life of the Christian isn’t one of superstardom. It isn’t one of celebrity and recognition, not after you’ve been confirmed, not at your 50 year Confirmation anniversary, not even if you go off and study to be a Worker in the Church, a Pastor, Teacher, Deaconess, DCE, or any other form of work for the Church. Your exaltation never comes. Don’t believe for a second that today is all about you and your holiness, or that now you are somehow holier and better than anyone else just because you’ve been confirmed. Today isn’t about you, or me, or anyone else gathered here. Today is all about God’s Service to us. About the Son of God who was glorified and exalted by dying on the cross. And about how all of us gathered here, confess Christ’s name, proclaiming him as Lord, we come here not to the glory of ourselves, but as Paul puts it, to the glory of God the Father.

The temptation in our lives is always to see opportunities to exalt ourselves and put ourselves up, instead of humbling ourselves to the place that God has called us. Even on Palm Sunday it’s easy to think in those terms. After all Jesus had been humbled his whole life. Born in a manger, raised by a lowly carpenter in a region that had a horrible reputation. He had to travel around in the company of lowly fishermen and tax collectors, not knowing where he was going to sleep, not knowing what he was going to eat. He lived a humble life on Earth despite being the very Son of the omnipotent God, and so in the events of Palm Sunday we may believe, as the crowds did, that this was finally the moment that Jesus had waited for. His “Reality Television” moment, when the title of “carpenter’s son” and “Nazarene” would be gone forever and he would finally accept his rightful place, making something of himself as he rides into Jerusalem the triumphant king. The omnipotent and powerful conqueror of the Romans, the Savior of the people who would be talked about for his might for years to come. This was his moment. Finally he would be more than just a servant.

But being a servant….well…that’s why Christ came. To be a servant. He who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Even God’s own Son did not count equality with God something for him to grasp. But oh how hard we try to grasp it ourselves. How hard we want to be the gods of our own lives. How much we want to be the rulers of our own worlds. Or how badly we want to be exalted up by God for the things we do. After all, we’re good people. We learned the catechism, we memorized it and studied it, we finally got through all the classes. We’re done with all this “God stuff” for a while, we finally made it. It’s an easy temptation. To think that we know what’s best for us and our faith. To think that we can decide how much of God’s Word we need to study and learn. And it’s true for someone just beginning their life as a confirmed child of God, as it is for those of us who remember our own Confirmations clearly. Confirmation is a wonderful opportunity to be publically recognized and vow before God and your fellow Christians to uphold your faith even to death. But it also has negative assumptions. Like this is the end of your instruction. Like you now know everything there is to know. That now things like Bible Class, Worship, participation and service to the Church are optional. That Confirmation is a Graduation.

How badly we want to believe that we can decide what is best and make ourselves equal with God. But that is a path that leads to destruction. It is a thought that went through the mind of Satan when he rebelled and led other angels against God. He wished to be seated on the same throne as God, but this idea led to him being thrown back down to earth. So will we receive a reality check if we believe we can go around what God commands in His Word. That we can be on the same level of God, and make something amazing of ourselves by what we do. Our works are filthy rags outside of Christ, which is why we too take the place of a servant. We too, like Christ, are nothing in comparison to the almighty power of God and his divine holiness. We deserve nothing but wrath, yet wrath is not what is bestowed upon us. For we are forgiven.

Forgiven not by our works but by the love of Jesus Christ . The one who humbled himself, even as he rode into Jerusalem and was hailed as a king, for he came riding on a donkey. The one who taught and pointed to the salvation found in his death and the repentance that was needed from the people in order to be saved. The one who pleaded for his life with the words. “Not my will, but yours be done.” The one who continuously showed love to his disciples and the people he met in his life by being a servant, washing their feet, sitting and eating with sinners, healing the sick, loving the lost. He still loves us, even when he has to humble our proud hearts. In the moments that we think we are exalted, he humbles us. Whether it’s our Confirmation Day, or any other. When we think we are greater than God, we must be humbled, brought low, made to see our sin and unworthiness. But the joy we have is that when we are low, feeling the contrition and humility of our sin and disobedience, that’s when God exalts us through the work of His Son Jesus Christ. That’s when we receive the forgiveness won for us on the cross, so that we in that moment do not confess our own names for our own glory, but instead bow before Christ and confess his name as our Savior, to the glory of God the Father.

And that strength is what we need to face this world. Together. As Brothers and Sisters in Christ, no matter how long we’ve been wading through this world and fighting the good fight of the faith. For you three this morning the journey has just begun. In a sense this is the end of your stay in religious boot camp, but you don’t go through all that instruction to just sit at home, you are trained to go out into the battle. I wish I could tell you that you will always live in the peace and security you enjoy now, here in God’s house, surrounded by family and friends of the same faith. But the truth is you are entering into a world hostile to the Gospel, hostile to God and his Word, and as you will learn sooner or later, hostile to you. Which is why I’m not here to tell you it will be easy, or that you will need to try harder, do more, and be the best Christian you can be. Instead I point you to the humility of Christ and his servant heart. I point you to the fact that we do not exalt ourselves, but we are passively exalted when we confess our sins and receive forgiveness. It’s something we must constantly be reminded of which is why your instruction isn’t over, it’s only begun.

So this day let us all be reminded of the one who was himself God and came down to Earth, not to make something of himself, but instead who made himself nothing in order to die for our sin. Let us join together as Brothers and Sisters in Christ to journey toward the cross, where we will see his ultimate act of love on our behalf, as he lays down his life for us. And finally this morning, as we welcome our Confirmands, may we pray for them in their journey of faith, that they may “Trust in the Lord with all their heart and not lean on their own understanding.” That they may be taught the way of the Lord, and walk in His truth. And finally that they would seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. God be with you and bless you, on this day, at this high point in your life of faith, and all throughout your journey until you remain forever in the Mighty Fortress of heaven with Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.