

John 16.23-33
Rogate (Easter 6) and Youth Confirmation
6 May 2018
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Hallelujah! +

Beloved in the Lord, and especially you catechumens, Gracelyn, Trustin, Colton, Alex, Gabby, and Finn: grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Who doesn't like a gift?

After all, think about what a gift means. There's gift itself, of course. It has its own value.

But even more, receiving a gift means that someone out there took notice of you. It means that someone out there cared about and for you enough to give at least passing thought to doing something good and nice to you. It means that someone out there took time or money or expended some effort to give you something of value—something you can use and keep all for your own.

Now, I'm sure some of you catechumens are already thinking about gifts—maybe you've already gotten yours. I remember from my confirmation day that my biggest gift—from my grandparents (and they did this every one of their grandchildren) came early, too. It was a new outfit. Just for confirmation. And for every Sunday after that: a sport coat, button-down collar shirt, tie, khaki slacks, a new belt and nice shoes. Big boy clothes.

And then more gifts came in once we got home after confirmation. Plaques, study bibles, bible handbooks, J.T. Mueller's *Christian Dogmatics*. Things I still use today. And things I don't, because I can't. Like the cash.

Those gifts all *mark* confirmation. But they're not what confirmation is about.

Instead, confirmation is about a different gift. And not just a different gift, but a different kind of gift. It's not wrapped in something opaque, but translucent. The words that go with it aren't on a card from Aunt Mary, they're God's Words. And it's not just a simple single-wrapper-single-gift gift. In fact, it's one gift that holds many gifts; and it's a gift that keeps on giving.

Strangely enough, it's no gift that you'll be getting today. For you've already gotten it. Gracelyn, you got yours on 13 November 2003; Trustin, yours was given on 27 June 2004; Colton, yours came on 29 June, 2003; Alex got his on 18 April, 2004; Gabby's present arrived on 24 October 2004; and Finn, you got to get yours on 1 August 2004.

Indeed, in a few moments, catechumens, you'll be up here at the altar rail. And the very first question you'll be asked is this: "Do you this day in the presence of God and of this congregation acknowledge the gifts that God gave you in your Baptism?"

Gifts within a gift. Treasures all packed up neatly inside of your Baptism. For inside this is what it has:

- the rich and daily forgiveness of all your sins in the Holy Christian Church (you're still a sinner, right?)
- rescue from your very own death, which can never outrun

- eternal life swapped out for your eternal condemnation
- heaven for your hell
- righteousness for your iniquity
- God as your friend and no longer your enemy
- the Son of God as your very own Brother
- victory over the devil and the world
- faith in God in the place of mistrust toward Him; and
- God's own promise to you that godless little you...you now had a God. And no insignificant God, at that, but the Lord of heaven and earth.

The wrapper and package? Not much to look at. Just water and God's Word taken at His command. But the gifts? Holy cats! Everything Christ had won for you when by His holy cross He conquered sin, death, and devil. Given you when you didn't even know it. Like a baby who's born as the heir of a millionaire.

Well, today, Colton and Gabby, Trustin and Finn, Gracelyn and Alex, we rummage around in that box a little more and discover yet another gift. It's not exactly like you're only just now discovering it. It's been there all along. But this is how the church year works. Each Sunday you get to go back through your baptismal gift box and rediscover another thing. And that's why you can't regard confirmation like graduation—like the day you're done with it all and move on to the next thing. How that breaks the heart of the Gift-Giver! For He's given a gift that keeps on giving. But if you move on to the next thing after confirmation? Why, that's nothing short of taking that gift and chucking it off into a corner of the basement.

No. This Sunday, just like every Sunday, we get to open another one of those little gifts. And it's the gift of prayer.

Lots of people think they have this gift. They don't. If they stand outside of Christ all their prayers are just so much hot air. Displeasing to God and rejected by Him.

But not you. Because it's all part of the package of your Baptism.

You see, in your Baptism you were given Christ.

- Christ as the one who descends from the Father.
- Christ, the only one who pleases the Father.
- Christ, who pleases the Father by fulfilling the impossible demands of the Law to a T and was never just a hearer only of the Word, but a doer of it.
- Christ, who pleases the Father by making Himself to be sin for us so that God could be faithful and *do* His Word to us—by giving us One who is put to death as sin and sinner for us.
- Christ who, through His death has conquered sin, death, and the world.
- Christ, who having completed His course on earth, ascended back to the Father—your own Brother in heaven itself.

In short, in your Baptism you were given Christ as your Mediator. As your go-between you and God.

And you needed a go-between, you did, between you and the Father.

Because explain to me: how in the world would you ever get a chance to speak face-to-face with LeBron James? Not a chance! LeBron is...LeBron! And he protects himself from the riff-raff like you and me. We have no business with him.

That's how it is with you and the Father—even much more so. You had no business with Him. For it's not that in and of yourself you're just riff-raff and a nothing. It's that in and of yourself you're a sinner, offensive to the very being of God, for God is holy.

No. If you don't know the right people, you can't get to LeBron.

And if you don't know Jesus Christ, the road to the heavenly Father and to the God and Lord of all heaven and earth—even the road of prayer—is closed to you. No detour available. Bridge out.

And that's no good. Because, as Jesus says, "in the world you will have tribulation." Why? Because here, you, as a sinner, live in a sinful world. You sin and are sinned against. And by it you ruin God's plan for this world and your own life; and others ruin it for you. And to cap it all off, this life of sin, it all ends miserably. Leaving you face to face with the chasm of the cold, dark grave.

But here enters the one Mediator between God and men—the Man Jesus Christ. And He promises you: whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you. The bridge that was washed out is restored.

But, of course, like so many of those gifts wrapped up in the package of our Baptism, most people don't think much of. Even baptized Christians. Because we see neither our great need nor Christ's immeasurable generosity.

But look at what Christ says. He deals not with little things, but with great needs. He doesn't say "if you make a humble request" or "if you ask for so much, great; but don't cross that line" or "you can ask for x, y, and z, but a, b, or c." He says, "whatever."

It's as if He were saying, "Look. There's no limit to what I can and will do for you." And with that He invites us not to think and pray little, but to think and pray big; and in thinking and praying big to commend all things into the hands of the Father. To pray not meek prayers, but "whatever" prayers.

And for this there is no prayer better than the Our Father.

In it Jesus commands and invites us to address Him as our heavenly Father. Think about that. Not friend. Not boss. Not acquaintance. But Father.

And then He asks *us* to ask *Him* the most outrageous things.

"Hallowed be your name, God!" Heavenly Father, You're the only one who can secure to me Your Holy Word. O Lord, always give me this gift, so that I might be saved!

"Thy kingdom come, God!" Heavenly Father, as if it's not already a lot to ask for your Word, give me Your Holy Spirit, too, so that when Your life-giving Word is right in front of me, I don't let it go in one ear and out the other and never anchor my hope for eternal life in it.

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, God!" Heavenly Father, I know that if it were my will that were to be done—or the world's or the devil's—I could never inherit eternal life. So, God, let *Your* good and gracious will be done for me.

“Give us this day our daily bread, God!” Heavenly Father, I am so richly blest in this life. Help me to see in mom and dad, brother and sister, my house and school, my friends, the police, our military, our government, my brown-bag lunch, Your good and gracious hand providing for me. And make me thankful to You for them!

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, God!” Heavenly Father, I see how it works here on earth: just for our life together to go on, we must forgive one another, otherwise it all falls apart. But when I think of You and me? O Lord, if You did not forgive me all my sins, I would be and have nothing. So, for the sake of Christ and according to Your promise, forgive me!

“And lead us not into temptation, God!” Heavenly Father, keep all temptation from me. Because it can only harm me—for this life and the next. Keep me in the Faith, O God!

“But deliver us from evil. Amen.” Heavenly Father, what I call good, You call evil; and what You call evil I call good. Help me to see in all things Your loving hand, and preserve through this life to the next that I might inherit heaven. Hear me, as I know You will, for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Those are the outrageous things Jesus asks us to ask Him.

That’s what it is to pray a “whatever” prayer. It’s to say, “Lord, into Your hands I commend myself. Entirely. To Your care and keeping.” And to trust His mercy for the sake of Jesus Christ His Son.

And that’s one of the gifts the Lord has given you in our Baptism.

May He continue to secure this gift to you and bring us all at last to everlasting life.

Amen.

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