

Are You Ready to Take a Stand?

A sermon based on Romans 1:16-17

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

So, Aurora, after 3 years of hard work, countless hours of time, well spent, with God in his Word, carefully learning the teachings God's Word has to share with us, putting it all into practice with your big project this last week, today, now comes the easy part, right? You're just a Bible passage and the Apostles' Creed recitation away from being confirmed. The end is in sight. And then it's all over, right? Or is it?

I guess I should ask that question of all of you here. What do you think? Most of you here have gone through some form of confirmation, Catechism class, learning what our church believes, teaches, and confesses (which just happens to be what God's Word says!). You stood up in front of a congregation, either as a young or older adult, confessed your faith, made some promises, and that was it?

I think those of us who've have a bit more experience in this world (although, for being only 13 years old, Aurora, you've have your fair share already) I think we would agree confirmation is not the end. Maybe the end of the beginning...the end of the training leading up to being confirmed and becoming a member of this congregation...but today, much more than that, this is the beginning of the end.

Your structured spiritual training is coming to a close. Gone are the days where Mom or Grandma has had to force you out of bed on a Sunday morning to get to Sunday School or church. Gone are the times Mom has had to entice you with some McDonalds to tough it out through Catechism Class (although I'm sure that's never had to happen!).

But you're not done, just like none of us here are done. Because now it's time. We're going to let you out into a battlefield out there to, as we've been talking about these last three years in Confirmation class, to fight the good fight of faith, to put into practice everything you've learned from God and his Word. You've been prepared for it. You're ready, right? Aurora, are you ready to take a stand? Fellow believers, are you ready to keep taking a stand?

Now, Aurora, it's your confirmation day, so I have a little surprise for you. I've been told that with past confirmation classes, there's been this tradition of having examination (you know, where the prospective confirmands would be grilled on their knowledge of God's Word and Luther's Catechism). And as scary as that would be, what made it even scarier was that it wasn't just the pastor asking the questions, but fellow members could ask questions as well. There's no way to prepare for that.

Well, I'd like to think I've been fairly gentle on you these past three years. You had it easy with me...well today, that ends. I want you to stand up and we're going to ask you some questions

Ok, I'm just joking. We're not going to do that. But how would that have made you feel? No time to study, so you're not sure of the answers. You'd probably get more than a few of them right, but odds are you'd probably get at least a few wrong. How would that make you feel? Probably nervous, embarrassed, ashamed to be standing up there and not knowing some of the answers. Am I right?

Well, how about if we flipped the tables. What if you got to come up here and ask everyone else the questions and see how much the congregation can remember from their days in catechism? I don't know if many would be able to shoot up and define the "means of grace" (it's the gospel which is found in God's Word and the Sacraments, where God creates and sustains saving faith in him, just to review).

There'd probably be quite a few who would falter in naming all 10 of the Commandments. And the three blessings God lovingly gifts us in the Lord's Supper, which I mention every time I make my close communion announcement (that's the forgiveness of sins, salvation, eternal life in heaven). But would you be able to name those off the top of your head at a moment's notice?

Imagine if you were the one getting grilled. I'm assuming the feelings would be quite similar...nervous, embarrassed, ashamed.

And this is God's house, where we're family, where we want each other to succeed, where we ought to feel comfortable, where we ought to be on top of God's Word and shine in our knowledge.

Friends, the questions don't stop here. They only get harder when we walk out those doors. Because what's outside this place is a world that's not quite as forgiving. What you see at your school are classmates who don't embrace but ridicule Christianity and what we believe. What you have on your street are neighbors who couldn't care less about God or Jesus or church but who are content to follow along the way of the world and continually hand themselves over to Satan. What you hear at work are people, who outwardly are cursing Jesus but who inwardly are crying out for help, for salvation.

And that's really true of anyplace in the world. Souls out there that are fighting against Jesus. Souls out there that are losing the battle to sin. Souls out there who desperately need to hear about Jesus and his grace. And so the fight begins...or continues. Aurora, are you ready to take your stand. Believers, are you ready to take your stand?

The topic in the lunch room at work is Bill Nye (yup, Bill Nye the Science Guy) and the latest on his crusade against creationism, how he's setting out to prove the theory of evolution by making Bible-believing Christians look like fools for having the gumption to think and believe that a higher being made all this in 7 days...and it didn't come about by chance over billions and billions of years. And your co-workers are all sounding their approval...even taking their shots at anyone dumb enough to believe that silly book...the Bible. And suddenly, shoving that forkful of salad into your mouth seems much more appetizing than speaking up and getting pounced on.

You're at a restaurant or at the movies with a group of your friends. The conversation is less than pleasant, ranging from their personal sexual encounters to trashing the government to plain, old, nasty gossip. And, of course, the conversation is laced with expletives. And you...A) Get up and leave, B) Tell them how inappropriate this kind of talk is, C) Follow suit and join in, or D) Say nothing. Probably more than 9 times out of 10, it's one of the last two options rather than speaking up.

You finally get the one-on-one time you've been missing with your close friend. She's been absent because life hasn't been going so great. There're problems at home, the job situation is a little shaky, money's tight, her mom's slowly spiraling into dementia. She laments, "Why me? Why does God hate me?" What do you do? What do you say? The perfect opportunity to share Jesus, right? But the best you got is the generic, "Keep your head up. Things will get better."

Aurora, in a little bit, you are going to do what so many of us have done, and that's make heartfelt promises to stand firm in your faith, to take a stand and for your Savior. That's easy to do...here. But out there, and we can attest to it, those promises are quickly forgotten.

I can't stand up here and say that I've made the most of every single opportunity to take a stand for Jesus, and neither can anyone else. To talk about our faith in Jesus, especially at times when your audience is hostile and critical towards believers, it's tough. At times, it can be uncomfortable or even awkward to talk about Jesus with others. You might not know what exactly to say or how to say it. And then there are just some times when we've been embarrassed about our faith, or have hidden our Christian identity, or just kept quiet.

But is that really a sin? Well, what has Jesus commanded us to do? "Go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them." "You are the light of the world...let your light shine." "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." And so, when we cower instead of taking a stand, yeah, it's a sin. When Jesus tells us to go and we make excuses, yeah, that's a sin. It's sin because by our inactivity, we show we're ashamed of God, ashamed of our faith, ashamed of what Jesus has done for us.

Sometimes we can be pretty quick to disown our God, and even for just one of those times, just one of those times we've kept quiet, just one of those times we run from the conversation, just one of those times we've been ashamed, just one of those times we've failed to take a stand, God should be ashamed of us. God should turn his face from us. God should give up on us, disown us, and let us topple down...to an eternity of hell.

God tried to do that once...kinda. In the book of Exodus, God was quite perturbed. He had done so much for his chosen children, the Israelites – bringing them out of slavery and Egypt, defeating their enemies, providing food and drink for them in the wilderness, giving them guidance, both personally and in his law – and how did they thank him? With their constant turning away...their constant wickedness and disobedience.

Well, here, they screwed up majorly, making and worshiping an idol, a golden calf. God was not happy. Here's what he said to Moses, "Because YOUR (emphasis on the your, not God's)...YOUR people, whom YOU brought up out of Egypt have become corrupt...my anger [will] burn against them and I [will] destroy them." God was ashamed of their behavior. He was ready to give up on them and destroy them.

But not so fast. Moses replied, "O LORD (the name for God that pointed out unending faithful love and kindness), why should our anger burn against YOUR (emphasis on God's people, not Moses') people, whom YOU brought out of Egypt?" He reminded God of his grace, his love, and God relented.

Friends, God doesn't need us to do that. He should be ashamed of us, should turn his back on us, but he's not. He doesn't. He's the LORD, the God of free and faithful grace. He loves us.

And Aurora, what' you've spent the past three years studying, what all of you have learned and are reminded of day after day, Sunday after Sunday...all of it centers around this gospel truth: in God's amazing love for us, he sent Jesus to live, to die, to rise.

We know that message so well. We have yielded to the world's pressures and may have been ashamed of our Savior, but he's not ashamed of us. He loves us. And his in love, he took a stand for us. He lived that perfect life we're incapable of doing. He bore our sin, guilt, and shame on the cross and gave us his perfect life and forgiveness. And he rose from the grave, the sign of his victory (and ours) over sin, death, and the devil.

This gospel message is the truth we get to stand firm on and make our stand for. Are you ashamed of what Jesus has done for you? There's no reason to be because what does Paul say? "In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed." By the grace of God, that gospel has been revealed to you and me. And its message is simple...because of Jesus, you are right with God. You are forgiven. No shame there. Not on God's part...not on ours, either.

You see, receiving those gifts by faith, and empowered by the Spirit, we are no longer ashamed of the gospel. We know it is God's power "for salvation to everyone who believes." The gospel appears foolish to the world, which may ridicule or persecute Christians, but we are proud of what Christ has done.

And, if we're not ashamed of the gospel, that means we're not ashamed to take a stand for it, either. Again, there will always be excuses for not sharing the gospel, not taking a stand...uncomfortable, don't know what to say, not very eloquent.

But here's an excuse to do – as Paul says, "It's the power of God for salvation." The word for power, literally, in the Greek language is *dunamis*, where our word 'dynamite' comes from. And that's what the power of the gospel is like. It has the power to explode, to make a real, saving, eternal impact in another person's life. It's done that for us!

You've learned the gospel. That alone makes you eloquent, just like the hymn says, "If you cannot speak like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, you can say he died for all." The simple message of Jesus, his love, his life, death, and resurrection, that's our stand.

Now, anytime could be "THE" time to share this dynamite of the gospel. For one girl, it was a fateful afternoon at Columbine High School in Middleton, Colorado, when a shooter, who had invaded the school, found her hiding, and at point blank range asked her if she believed in Jesus. She took a stand, said "Yes," and he shot and killed her.

That simple message, the dynamite of the gospel. Aurora, your time...friends, your time to take a stand is now. You are ready because Jesus has made you right with God.

In the verse before our section this morning, Paul said, "I am so eager to preach the gospel...to you." Not only are you ready to take a stand; you are eager, excited, again because Jesus has made you right with God. You have the simple message of the gospel, loaded with the power of salvation. And best of all, you have a God who promises he's with you always.

This is just the beginning, but you're ready. In God, in his grace, equipped with the gospel, you are ready. Amen.