

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
May 19, 2013
Confirmation Day**

Surviving Life

- 1. Scripture's encouragement to action!**
- 2. Divine blessings promised by the Lord**

Hymns: 176 – 184 – Distribution: 309, 310 – 360 (Class hymn) – “*Heavenly Father, Send Your Blessing*”

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Proverbs 3:1-6 – My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, ²for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. ³Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. ⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways acknowledge to him, and he will make your paths straight.

A pastor thinks hard about what to say on a day like this. Young people that he has instructed are prepared to make their vows of faithfulness to the Lord and become communicant members of the church. It is a momentous day. These are young people that he has taught for a number of years and have already received many words of instruction from him. What more is there to say? And in this short time of a sermon, what is important to include? Add to that the fact that a pastor can have his own children in the class who have

been with him all their lives, and it makes it all the more difficult to consider what to say.

It's bad enough that there is real danger out there in this cold world. Physical dangers lurk everywhere, as evidenced by the news in the past weeks:

- Kidnappers who might try to take you away
- Bombs that might be planted anywhere
- Storms that threaten your safety
- Crooked people who want your money
- Crazy drivers out there

It leaves parents and grandparents giving constant advice to look over your shoulder, don't get into any strange cars, but put on your seat belt and don't be texting while driving.

How will you survive life?

However, we all know those aren't the biggest dangers out there. As we gather in God's house for a spiritually meaningful day, we know that spiritual dangers to your faith lurk ahead:

- The devil who tempts and lies
- “Friends” in the world
- Trials and temptations

How will you survive life? All of us here today are thinking about this, and praying for your faith. What is there to say?

The text I've chosen for your Confirmation Day is Proverbs 3:1-6, which are meaningful words to think about: ***“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”***

1. Scripture's encouragement to action!

You might remember who wrote those words. If you're not sure, here's a hint: It was the wisest man who ever lived. It was the man to whom the Lord appeared early in his reign and said, "Ask for whatever you want, and I will give it to you," and he answered that he wanted to be blessed with wisdom. It was King Solomon.

The book of Proverbs is a book of wisdom. The early chapters are written in the style of instructional language, where a father is speaking to his son and giving him sound advice to follow for life. Since Solomon is giving this instruction by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it will serve us well in providing us thoughts today.

Let's consider this question first: What dangers do you think lurked out there for an Old Testament young man? Do you think they'd be a lot different from dangers today?

- Temptations to want "more and more"? Seeing all the work animals, flocks, and fine clothes that his neighbor had, and being obsessed with pursuing them from a covetous heart?
- Temptations toward "wanting to do it my own way, father!?" Stubbornness? Pride? Disrespect?
- Temptations toward immorality? Toward those of the opposite sex who were fair and young?
- Temptations toward misplaced priorities? Missing the Sabbath at the synagogue? Loving something more than God in the heart? Money? Land? Things? Pleasure?
- Temptations toward bad relationships with others? Hate! Personality conflict! Angry words! Jealousy!

I believe all those things and more would be spiritual dangers to a young man in Solomon's day. And if you think about it, I don't think the concept has changed all that much down through time. Therefore, let's take note as King

Solomon gives his godly advice to his son and take it as spiritual advice today as well. Solomon gives a number of directions:

1. **Do not forget my teaching** – You have had two years of instruction from your pastors in the teachings of the Bible. The time we have spent together has both seemed like a long time and also that they have passed quickly. You were instructed with much true wisdom from the Word of God. At times, no doubt, those hours of Confirmation class seemed long and the homework difficult, but those were precious hours, for they brought you the most precious information from the wisest of the wise, the Lord himself.

I'd submit to you that you have learned a storehouse of knowledge during those years. What are the three blessings of marriage? Who wrote the New Testament and in what language? What three requirements does the Bible command for those who receive the Lord's Supper? And many more. Now, Solomon tells us not to forget!

"Forgetting" is a trait of humans that is all too common! Do you forget? Were there days when you forgot to do your assignment for one of our classes? Or your lunch? Or when you forgot your basketball uniform or your band instrument? I'm sure adults here could tell us how they have forgotten things: What to pick up from the store, where they put their keys, where they parked the car, or what that phone number was. **King Solomon here tells you not to forget what you have learned in your instruction!**

This is a good time to ask yourselves, "Is this the height of your Bible knowledge?" Is this the time of your life when you know the most about

justification, redemption, atonement, and sanctification? Is it all downhill from here? **Do not forget!**

- 2. Keep / Bind / Write on your heart –** Solomon's second piece of advice in our reading today is: Keep! Bind! Write! Keep my commands in your heart. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. Solomon encourages his son not simply to "not forget" his teaching, but to do special things with it. Keep it – Don't throw it away! Bind it around your neck – Have it as jewelry or ornaments that people can see through your actions! Write it on your heart! Do you get the feeling that the Word of God is supposed to be more than your possession? Rather, it's really a part of you.

One thing that crosses my mind is the sermon summaries that you had to write to complete your work for Confirmation class. Do you remember those? If so, how do you remember them? Most likely as an assignment that you had to do which was not too enjoyable. It was homework. And it was not easy at first!

As a Christian matures, they have a different view of sermon material (hopefully). Rather than looking at listening carefully to a sermon as "work" or a "chore," Solomon encourages us to savor time spent in Scripture and to plant it deep in your heart. Sermon time especially is a time when God's Word is nourishing the believer. It's not a time to merely be remembering material so you can type it out and get a passing grade. It is a time to listen because it's a part of you and your surviving life.

Will you write the Word on your heart? As I look on the back cover of the bulletin at our anniversary classes, I see a number of names of people who have followed through on writing the teachings of Scripture on their hearts for life. But I also see names of those who have not done this. What an encouragement this is to follow King Solomon's advice on this day!

- 3. Trust in the LORD –** The word "trust" is an interesting word in this phrase. In Hebrew the word conveys the feeling of safety, security, and confidence. Have you ever heard a person – perhaps an aging one – say that they don't feel safe in their home anymore? That's a terrible feeling. Where is your "safe" place? Solomon tells us that the place of safety, confidence, and security is only found in the Lord.

Again, another interesting word – LORD (all capital letters). This is the name for God that stresses his unchanging covenant that he has made with mankind to save them. It is a Gospel name for God. He made a plan to save the world through his Son, Jesus Christ, and he would let nothing get in the way of carrying it out. No spiritual or human enemy would stand in his way of sending our Savior to live for us and be crucified to pay for our sins and to rise again. This is your biggest security and confidence in life!

- 4. Lean not on your own understanding –** Will there come a day when you say, "I know better – I know best despite what anyone else, even God, says"? You might be fooled into thinking, "I need to lie about that. I need to be dishonest about that." When it comes to clear commands in God's Word concerning anything from stealing to living together

before marriage, from committing adultery to having an abortion, people have basically said those words to God. "I know better. I need to do this."

There was someone else who originally said that. "I know better. I don't need to keep that command to avoiding eating fruit from that one tree in the garden. I need to. I know better." When Adam and Eve followed their own understanding and ambition, that plunged a world into ruin, tragedy, and destruction. Avoid their ambition! Lean not on your own understanding.

- 5. In all your ways acknowledge him.** Literally, the word "acknowledge" is the word for "know." In all your ways, know God. This will mean entering into every day and every activity of life with a repentant and submissive heart. It means that whatever plans you are making for various stages of life, you are doing them with God in mind. It means that you will enter every day and every endeavor with prayer. Know God in all that you do!

The Lord had a clear message through the prophet Jeremiah that sums up this Scriptural encouragement well: *"This is what the LORD says: 'Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the LORD"* (Jeremiah 9).

What godly encouragement all of this is from the wisest man who ever lived!

2. Divine blessings promised by the Lord

But there's a little bit more. This reading is not only about "Do! Do! Don't do!" It also describes great blessings for those who do put

their faith in the Lord and love him with all their heart, soul, and strength. What blessings does the Lord have to give?

Verse 2 says about God's teachings, **"They will prolong your life many years." Long life is a blessing that follows.** This is much like the 4th Commandment: *"Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."*

Long life is a prized goal in our world! In fact, for many worldly people, it is the only goal. Long life actually is also a blessing God grants to those who follow his ways. Numerous places in Scripture describe a believer's life ending after many years and a full life. There certainly are exceptions to the rule, but the general rule still remains that God stands ready to bless his believers with a long life here. When you keep his commands it certainly does make for a safer life. We also remember that those who put their trust in God will have a life lengthened for an eternity in heaven!

Verse 2 says that a second blessing that God has in store for you is "prosperity." That word might cause some to misunderstand here. Literally, it says that God will give them SHALOM. If you've heard that Hebrew word before, it involves many things!

- Peace
- Harmony in relationship
- Prosperity in having all that you need
- Wholeness
- Completeness
- Blessedness

We know that the best "peace" that we have through faith in Christ is peace with God and forgiveness. Peace of conscience. Peace of mind.

A third blessing is mentioned in verse 4: *"Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man."* Literally, these are the words for grace and wisdom before God and man. Grace is ours! God's undeserved love. And your reputation among those around you will be blessed by God as well. Jesus himself *"grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men"* and his followers do as well.

And finally, in the last verse we hear God promise that he will make your paths straight. That may not seem to be that remarkable of a promise until we remember that in their culture walking or riding a beast of burden was the way to get around. Just think if that were true in our area of the country! I think back to the time I went on the trip to the coast with the 7-8 grade classes last year. We hiked! Some of it was easy; some was not. At an especially difficult part of the trails we needed a rope, along with the assistance of our friends. Confirmands, think back to this and remember that God will get you through all of your paths. This is not a guarantee of a trouble-free life. After all, God knows best what testing we need and what trials will refine us. Yet through all of them, we have the sure promise that God will lead us through our paths, making them straight for us, and we will be able to traverse these paths with his guidance and strength!

So, what now? As we close our look at encouragement and blessings on this Confirmation Day, we ask that question. What now? After all, this is not an end. It is not graduation. That's in two weeks on Graduation Sunday. This is Confirmation Day, and the road of your lives lies ahead of you. What now? Will you survive life? As we consider that question, we're thinking mainly of the spiritual dangers that lurk around you.

May you – and all of us – listen to Solomon's advice. May we be encouraged to action in the commands he has given us. And may God richly shower his blessings on all of us, and on you especially on your Confirmation Day and beyond! Amen.