

God Loves You! Be Faithful!

John 3:16; Rev. 2:10b

May 4, 2025 (Easter 3-C/Confirmation)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

In the name of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ, dear friends, and especially you, St. Paul's confirmation class of 2025:

It's the custom at confirmation to have a Bible passage picked out for the confirmand. I gave Cooper and Colson a selection of passages to choose from. Cooper chose John 3:16, and Colson the last half of Revelation 2:10. I am going to use those texts as the basis of this sermon to encourage both confirmands, and all of us here: **God Loves You! Be Faithful!**

The text you chose, Cooper, is perhaps the most well-known passage of all of Scripture, John 3:16: ***"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*** The Lord Jesus spoke these words to a religious teacher named Nicodemus. Nicodemus recognized Jesus was a teacher sent from God, but stumbled over his teachings like being "born again." So Jesus gave a simple summary of God's plan of salvation. In this short verse we learn so much about God, his love, whom his love is for, and how we receive salvation and eternal life. It is rightly called the "gospel in a nutshell."

Start with the word "God." You have come to know, Colson and Cooper, who God is. "God is one." Unlike the ideas of many then and many today, there is just one God who made all things, one God who preserves all things—one God we are to worship, one God who loves us. Yet, within the unity of God we find a "trinity," three distinct persons, yet of the same essence, each of whom are equally God: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The triune God loves you.

God the Father *so loved the world*. The First Article of the Creed teaches us that God made the heavens and the earth, this vast universe, yet took special care of the crown of his creation on earth—mankind. We say with Martin Luther in the catechism, "I believe that God created me and all that exists, that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities." We rejoice with the psalmist, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14). Cooper and Colson, even when you get disappointed with your bodies, wishing you might be 8 inches higher so you can compete better with taller athletes, never forget that God loves you in the way he made you.

Tragically, the beautiful world God made got ruined because of sin. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, all human beings have been sinful ever since. God had to write the Ten Commandments so that we can know accurately what his will is for us. The law shows us that we've sinned and deserve God's punishment. But that didn't stop God's love. God the Father *so loved the world* that he promised a Savior. Jesus tells us who: *"that he gave his one and only Son."*

The Second Article teaches us that Jesus himself is God's one and only Son. He is the only one begotten of God the Father from eternity. Other religions will claim their access to God, but only the Son, Jesus, is the Christ, the one anointed to be our Prophet, Priest and King, our Savior. Peter declared, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Only Jesus could carry out God's plan of salvation, to offer up his life as a perfect sacrifice and die for everyone's sins. And as we celebrated two weeks ago on Easter, only Jesus rose from the dead and conquered death for all. Christ is the one who rules forever!

Jesus promises that “*whoever believes in [the Son] shall not perish but have eternal life.*” But, Cooper and Colson, how could we hope to believe in that? For the spiritual condition we’re born with is one that is spiritually dead, unable to come to God and believe this. Luther wrote in the catechism, “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him.” But God again so loved the world that he gave us someone to raise us from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ. The Third Article teaches us of God the Holy Spirit. And God the Holy Spirit *so loves* you that he called you by the gospel, enlightened you, and sanctified us that we are now believers in Jesus Christ.

To do that, the Holy Spirit uses what we call the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament. In this very church, the two of you were baptized roughly 14 years ago. The Holy Spirit came on you then in Baptism to make you children of God. You grew up in Christian households to learn about Jesus; you came to church and confirmation class to grow in your knowledge and faith. You know, thanks to the Holy Spirit, how much **God Loves You**. Now today you will be making your promises to God. For that, let’s now focus on the passage that you, Colson, chose, from Revelation 2:10b: ***Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.***

“**Be faithful!**” Many years after Jesus ascended, he spoke these words to his old disciple John, telling him to write this for one of his congregations. It was to a church undergoing hardship, tough times, persecution. But Jesus wanted John to encourage them: “Be faithful, full of faith! God will not let you down.”

I encourage you likewise, Colson and Cooper: “Be faithful!” Be faithful with the means of grace. Be regular attenders of church, hearers of God’s Word and readers of the Bible at home, for the Holy Spirit uses that to build up faith. Remember, confirmation is not the end, but really the beginning of a lifetime of reading and study of God’s Word. Also, starting today, you will have the privilege of taking the sacrament called Holy Communion. You have learned that what you will be receiving is the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus, in, with, and under the bread and wine. We offer this twice a month at St. Paul’s. Take advantage of this every time we offer it, to receive that assurance that, yes, your sins are forgiven, because his body, his blood is, as Jesus said, “*For you.*”

Be faithful, Colson and Cooper, with the keys and confession. Even after confirmation you’ll find yourself tempted to sin, and in weakness giving in to sin. Don’t shrug it off and say, “That’s just the way I am.” Go daily to God in prayer and confess your sin, ask for forgiveness as we say in the Lord’s Prayer, and then hear the absolution when you come to church or privately to your pastor, “Your sins are forgiven!” Don’t forget that God also gives you the keys to share the news of forgiveness with others, and support the work of the church in getting the word of peace to others, from around the world to here in our community.

“Be faithful,” Cooper and Colson, “*even to the point of death.*” Does that phrase scare you? We might not face the intensity of persecution to the degree that believers of the early church did. Still, it won’t always be easy to hold firm to God’s Word in today’s world. You’ll have that science teacher who insists that creationism is wrong and evolution is right. Hold firm to what the Bible teaches. You’ll hear from others who claim to be Christian that Jesus didn’t physically rise from the dead, or that immoral lifestyles, deviant sexual sins and abortion should be tolerated in today’s world. Don’t be swayed. Be faithful to God’s teachings, all of them.

“*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*” In Jesus’ day, the Greeks would award a wreath or a crown for the winner of a race or athletic contest. Is Jesus saying that our faithfulness gives us the victory and earns eternal life for us? Picture it rather like a baseball game. You and I and all believers in Christ are on Jesus’ team. We’re out in the field, but Jesus is on the mound as the ace pitcher, and he strikes out the side, each and every inning. We don’t have even a ground ball or fly ball hit in our direction—good thing, because we’d muff it. And when it’s our turn to bat, Jesus pinch hits for us and hits the home run. Yet we run the bases and we get to celebrate the victory as we all go home, wearing a crown of life, eternal life—and Jesus is the one who won the game! So Cooper and Colson, be faithful, because God loves you! Amen.