

Sermon – Mark 10:35-45  
David R. Lyle  
Grace Lutheran Church  
22 Pentecost/Confirmation – Year B  
20 October 2024

### “Confirmed and Called”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Well, friends, you’ve made it. You’re here! At the beginning of seventh grade, the twelve of you embarked on this journey called Confirmation. Now, here you are today, ready to have your baptismal promises affirmed, ready to make public proclamation of your faith, ready – with God at your side – for whatever comes next. I hope it hasn’t felt too much like school. After all, we don’t hand out grades, we hand out grace. I like to think we’ve had some fun along the way, here at Grace, on retreat at Lutherdale, and serving in our community. But you have attended classes, and you’ve had teachers. So, it’s been a *bit* like school. And I hope you’ve felt the freedom over these two-plus years to truly open up, to explore, and to ask probing questions – of your teachers, of the Bible, of God. I imagine that at some point in your life, in some class or another, a teacher has said to you, encouragingly, “There’s no such thing as a bad question. There are no stupid questions.” Which is absolutely true. Most of the time. But goodness, do James and John ask something downright foolish of Jesus in today’ gospel reading. No bad questions, you say? Well, here, hold our Mountain Dew.
2. Hey Jesus, the brothers ask, can we sit at your right hand and at your left when you are in your glory? Are these guys serious? Have they not been listening at all while Jesus has been teaching them? Immediately before our reading today, Jesus tells them – for the third time! – that he is going to

- Jerusalem; there, he will meet his death. The first time Jesus tells them, Peter tells him to stop talking nonsense. The second time, the disciples barely hear him, so busy are they arguing amongst themselves about which of them is the greatest. The third time, James and John have no time to worry about Jesus' cross. All they can think about is the seating chart! Sorry guys, not a great question, and not a great look.
3. The good news, of course, is that Jesus' classes were grace-based. The first twelve disciples took a while to catch on. But you, you caught on quickly if with a bit of hesitation. In his witness statement given here last night, Luke writes refreshingly of his lack of interest in beginning confirmation; he was determined not to go. So, here's to all of the parents, for taking seriously those promises made at the baptismal font all those years ago. Still, Luke writes of the power of knowing that God is on the journey with us, even if we don't know where we're going, that we can be "courageous and strong" for "God is with us wherever we go." Tyler writes about the beauty of it not being up to us, that we can trust that God will forgive our sins, which "feels like a weight has been taken off your shoulders, opening you up to new possibilities." Katharina writes of how she enjoys playing her violin for God: "Even if I mess up, which I do a lot, I know God is proud of me for playing my violin." Amen! And it's worth noting she did not mess up at all while playing Bach for us last night in this space.
  4. These promises are made sure and certain for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is why Jesus takes the time to repeat his passion prediction three times. It is here, in the cross and the empty tomb, that we find our hope. Laney writes, "I know that because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, my future is secure, and I know nothing can separate me from God's love." For Matthew, this means "living with a joy that the world cannot take away and a faith in God that helps me always move forward." And we can trust this promise, Kat reminds us in both her writing

and her painting, because the “cross of Christ (is) in the middle of infinity, which represents that God will be enthroned forever.”

5. Thank God that the promises are true, because the life to which Jesus calls you is not easy. The vocation of the baptized is the way of life, but it is not the way of easy greatness and places of honor. Jesus asks, do you wish to be great? But do you know what that means? You have many voices in your ears, friends, telling you to be great in the eyes of the world. And you will do great things, of this I am sure. But greatness, true greatness, comes from a life of service, love lived out for the world around us. And the world needs you. Your neighbor needs you. Evelyn reminds us of all that afflicts us: war, gun violence, climate change. Where do we even begin? “One person cannot fix a worldwide problem,” she writes, but we can “realize what is happening and do the smallest things to make a difference.” The outcome may be uncertain, but Hudson reminds us that “when I pray to God, asking for the strength to accomplish what I need to, I find it gives me a feeling of peace and security because I know [God] hears me.” We can’t do it all on our own. Naomi, sharing about a time of struggle in her life, proclaims, “Asking for help isn’t a bad thing. ... God showed me that I deserved help, I deserved guidance, and I deserved love.” We can even treat ourselves like that, Charlie notes. The gifts we are called to give to others, like kindness, compassion, and patience, are also things God asks that we offer ourselves.
  
6. Of course, you’re not done learning, friends. Look around. Those of us who are confirmed are still on a journey, with as many questions and answers. Perhaps this is why Mark tells this part of Jesus’ story in a particular way. The three passion predictions are clustered close together, sandwiched between two stories in which Jesus opens the eyes of the blind. The first time, oddly, Jesus has to do it twice. It’s hard to get those eyes open! The second time, it works right away. We don’t always get it, but Jesus will open our eyes, and Jesus will bring us life through his death, his life given as the ransom for

many. I think this is why Carson's comparison of God to a t-ball coach seems so apt, for what are we if not six-year-old children learning to play a complex game, unsure of how to begin. But Carson hears the coach's words as God's own: "Do not be afraid, do your best, and don't worry about it." God, after all, is always with you. In that promise, we can stop worrying about our place in line or our seat at the table. We can see that, created by God, redeemed by Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, we are already enough. In that promise, Ellen can write, "I also became much more content with the person that God made me to be and confident in myself. I know that because of Jesus I am a child of God and that frees me to not worry what other people want me to be" And thank God for that, for the twelve of you are just who God made you to be, and you are just what the world needs. Forgiven and free, and beloved by all of us, God will use you to bless this world as you care for your neighbors.

7. Friends, there is much to do. But all that is needful is already done. The work is big, but our God is bigger. Pastor Rose Mary Sánchez-Guzmán, Senior Pastor of Iglesia Luterana Cristo Rey, a Lutheran Church near the border in El Paso, is no stranger to the work that needs to be done. She also knows it's not up to her. Or to you or me. She says, "It's not about making the other person believe what you believe. It's about helping the other. If we form groups that help the neighbor, the Holy Spirit will create belief in the midst of it." So go, friends, content and confident, unafraid and unashamed. Keep asking questions. Christ, who was dead, is alive, and you are alive in him. You, friends, are the church, and you are what the world needs. You've never needed to make the grade; it's grace all the way down. You have been given grace, and you are grace for this world. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.