

For over 25 years I have been involved in teaching confirmation classes, helping students to understand what God has done for them in Jesus Christ, assisting them in learning what “confirmation” really is. Although we often talk about a church or a pastor confirming the faith of young people, that's only part of it. The real confirmation comes from the young people themselves, and what they are confirming is God's claim on their lives. They are confirming that their adoption into the family of God still holds. They are confirming that faith in Jesus exists in them and is growing. But it's taken me until now to realize that for many years I have subjected these young people to the same sermon twice on their confirmation Sunday. And so, finally, for the first time this year, I'm giving them something different to listen to at the second service, the service at which they are making their formal confirmation of faith in Jesus. And to do that, the source of my remarks are the verses that they have chosen to be spoken over them in blessing, just a few minutes from now.

So let us learn from the Word that's been selected by our confirmation students, beginning with Allison Deets' choice of Psalm 118 verse 24, “This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

This is a great, memorable verse, with good reason. We often think of God as the maker and the creator of the world and the universe, which is appropriate. But this verse narrows the scope while telling us something important about God. Psalm 118 verse 24 says *this is the day* the Lord has made. It's a reminder that the events of this day—the circumstances, the blessings and the challenges—come from one maker, one author, and that is God. Now that could be a scary thought depending on whom you believe God to be, and how he feels about you. But look at the conclusion that this verse comes to immediately: “let us rejoice and be glad in it.” If you believe, as we do, that God is basically and fundamentally for us, that he has our best interest in mind always, that the cross of Jesus is proof of an unstoppable love for us that comes from him, then knowing that God made this day is cause for rejoicing. We can be glad, our hearts can be lightened, it is possible to experience real joy, because the God who made this world, the God who forgave all of my sins in Jesus, the God who made me a part of his family by holy baptism, also made this day for me in which to live. This is a completely different way of thinking about life than what worldly philosophies offer us. This is what the world calls wisdom: life is random and short. It's up to you to determine what's best for you and to go get what makes you happy. This verse from the psalm turns that philosophy inside out and says, the God who made this world, the God who loves you, also made this day for you, and has things for you to do in it. When, by faith, we take these words to heart, life is a joy, and cause for gladness. Why? Because the author of this day loves you.

Next up is Mandi Petonic's verse which is Psalm 18 starting in verse 2: “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my savior, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” I don't know of a more rugged, confidence-boosting description of God, that says so much about him in such a short distance. Listen again to the language: these are all words used to describe the Lord in this passage: rock, fortress, savior, shield, horn of salvation, stronghold. This is the language of protection, defense, giving the impression that we are soldiers in a war. And the truth of the matter is, we are. We may not like to think of our lives in those terms, we would much prefer peace and tranquility, but since God has claimed us as his own and brought us

over to his side—the side of light and love and sacrifice—we must also accept that there is a side of darkness and hatred that opposes us. It simply describes the reality in which we find ourselves.

That being the case, what a joy and comfort it is to know that we are not thrown into this war, this battle by ourselves and expected to fight with the strength that we have. Instead, life with God, even though it's described as a struggle, and spiritual warfare is a part of that, God himself becomes the fortress and the stronghold in which we are to take refuge. He is the shield that defends us from attack from both outside forces and inner temptations; he is the Savior, the champion who acts and fights on our behalf. We need only remain close to him.

And that's a perfect segue into Holden Hedrick's verse, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age," from Matthew 28 verse 20. We need to remain close to Jesus, but the good news in all its truth is that Jesus has already promised to remain with us always. I think it's significant that Jesus spoke these words at a pivotal moment; He had just given his disciples a monumental task, and He was just about to leave them and ascend into heaven. The monumental task was to make disciples of all nations, and Jesus' ascension would come as a shock—yet his promise is *to still be with those he loves*.

Please listen to Him. Jesus, the one who claims all authority in heaven and on earth; the one who became a servant and paid for your sin with his suffering and death on the cross; the one who rose from the dead to give you power over death; the one who ascended into heaven to rule over all things with His Father; has promised to be with you at every moment of your life's journey.

But is that promise to be with you only true in an invisible, spiritual sense? No, not at all! If someone is with you, you expect to hear their voice, and you have the voice of Jesus in the words of the Bible. Every time you read the Bible, every time you speak or sing the words of the Bible, every time you remember the message of the Bible, Jesus is talking to you. And not only that, if someone is with you, and spends a lot of time with you, you will eventually sit down and eat with them. You'll share a table at some point. Every time you come to the Lord's Supper—do you see—Jesus is joining you at His Table. He is the host of that meal—and He is what you receive.

He is with you always—right this moment, and then through your high school years, and whatever comes next, and the thing about Jesus is that He's a giver. He loves to give gifts. To have someone like that, always with you, is the power source for a Christian life.

So thank you, Allison, Mandi, and Holden for choosing these verses. You've reminded us to rejoice in this day, made for us by God; and to live courageously because He is defending us and has promised to always be with us. You've encouraged us all, more than you know.