**April 21st 2024 Jubilate Sunday**

**Confirmation of Lydia Marrs and Stevie Hobbs**

**Text: John 12:24-26** 0718

**Theme: Grow in Grace.**

May the Lord God ever uphold and keep you all in the true Christian faith, that whatever you may face you may ever be children of your Father in heaven through the merit of Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear Christians: Today we celebrate and recognize the hard work of two students who have spent years studying the doctrines of Scripture, as Martin Luther simply taught in his Small Catechism. Stevie and Lydia have been dedicated to learning these things, and we want to recognize their hard work in doing so, and I ask that all the congregation would pray for them going forward that they do not neglect their continued studies. That is the central idea of today’s sermon, to exhort both Lydia and Stevie to continue learning and studying, to grow in grace, as our theme says. We also hear: *“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet. 3:18)* Now as we proceed through our study of this text and of our theme, it is quite important that each one of us apply these things to ourselves. These words, though primarily directed to Lydia and Stevie on the day of confirmation, are for everyone. The words of Peter are inspired by God, as so each one of us should grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Our Bibles should be well used and worn, our catechisms should be studied again and again. We should prioritize the hearing of God’s Word as it is read, preached, taught in Bible Class, pondered and meditated upon. After all the old saying goes: “A well-worn Bible is owned by a healthy soul.” If our Bibles and catechisms simply sit on our bookshelves collecting dust we are doing ourselves a great disservice, for we know that the Holy Spirit works within the Word. If we neglect attendance to Bible Class we rob ourselves of the grace of God given through that teaching. If we finish catechism classes and set our catechism down to never pick it up again, we remove from ourselves the pure doctrine found therein. Let us not be as those who are too busy for the grace of God, but prioritize His Word and doctrine, and it is promised to us that grace and blessing are found therein. This we hear: *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” (Ps. 1:1-3)* Notice that God plants us in a well-watered and fruitful place by the Word, by the daily and nightly meditation of the Word.

Think about the greatness of our God in the grace of our Savior. We were created in perfection. We were given perfect blessedness with everything we could ever need, food and water in abundance, God near at hand to speak with and walk with. We were given perfect righteousness in which we knew God perfectly and were as willing to serve and obey Him as the angels in heaven. And we were given perfect happiness in all the things God had provided especially in providing a perfect dwelling with Him. This was man’s creation in the image of God, and these are the gifts that we threw away from ourselves, and chose rather to serve the lusts of our hearts, of our sinful flesh. Perfection was lost, paradise was lost. And yet, rather than utterly destroy us in His wrath, as He justly could have, God gave the Gospel unto man, wherein their sin would be paid and they would be restored to perfection, to paradise. Does this not motivate our hearts and give exhortation to ever learn these things? Can we, knowing what God has done, put it away from ourselves again and continue to serve the lusts of our flesh? Indeed we cannot. It is with these things in mind, and our theme exhorting us to grow in grace that we examine our text for today which is found in the twelfth chapter of the Gospel according to John beginning at verse twenty four.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O most gracious Lord and Savior, we come before Thee today in prayer for Thy servants confirmed in the true faith. We ask that Thou wouldst send Thy Holy Spirit unto them in great measure, that they may not forget the lessons they have learned, nor neglect Thy Word as they grow. Cause them to grow in Thy grace and knowledge for the rest of their days. We pray also for all of our members and those who visit us today, that they learn to follow Thee. Teach us that when a seed is planted, the seed must first die, but if it die it will bring forth much fruit. Help us, O Lord, to die to the world, to despise the things of the world and everything in it, and to renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways. Teach us to daily take up our cross and follow Thee, patiently enduring the attacks of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh, and receiving Thy chastisement in grace and in faith. O Savior, uphold us for the rest of our lives. Make us Thy disciples and Thy servants. Put Away the works of the flesh, teaching us to lose our lives for Thy sake, that we may have eternal life. Grant, O Lord, the glorious Gospel unto us all our days, that we never forget Thee or Thy grace, and may when our last hour has come have confidence that we are forgiven and saved through Thy shed blood, in which we pray. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us learn to grow in grace:

1. **Dying to the world.** We read verses twenty four and twenty five of our text: **read verses here.** The words of Jesus in our text are seen in the wider context of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His coming crucifixion for the sins of the world in a few short days. He is teaching both of His own death, and the conversion and subsequent growth of a Christian in the one true faith. Stevie and Lydia here today mark their confirmation in this Christian faith, renewing the vows they made at their Baptisms, through their sponsors, this time confessing with their own mouths the faith which resides in their hearts. This is important and is a moment we should not let pass by without pondering it. The two girls are now adult Christians, able to examine themselves and partake of the Supper of our Lord, given and shed for the remission of their sins. This is not some small moment, but its magnitude is of eternal consequence. It is that eternal consequence that we talk about today. Lydia and Stevie, I say to you that today should not be the end of your study, as if you have learned all there is to know concerning the wisdom, grace, and glory of God. Rather today marks the beginning of your adult Christian life. To you both then, I say, that from this moment forward you will increasingly become responsible for your ongoing growth in grace. You will grow up and live on your own, no longer will your parents be there to tell you to get out of bed and get ready for church, no longer will your parents guard you against temptation and sin. These things will now fall to you in the faith and grace of God which you have confessed today.

Yet these words do not only apply to those who are confirmed today, but to everyone here. There are many young members of this congregation and those who visit, and the Lord, in our text has something to teach to each and every one of us. He speaks first concerning the death of a seed, which death brings forth fruit. Here we have a deep truth; first concerning the very death of Jesus Himself, for in His death He has purchased forgiveness and salvation as the fruit of His death. But secondly, and more to the point of today’s sermon, Jesus points directly at each of us and says it is necessary for us to die to the world. We hear in another place: *“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” (Rom. 8:13)* The word mortify means to die or kill. We are to die to this world, putting away the former lives of unbelief, becoming new creatures in Christ our Lord. Now on a day to day basis, what does it look like to die to the world? It means that we are no longer servants to sin. We go forward day by day being shown what things displease God, and we sincerely desire to be free from those sins of the flesh. We are not to be drunkards, we are not to give our bodies over to fornication, sexual sins; we are no longer to be greedy of gold and silver, of riches and personal gain; we are not to be servants to sin, but servants to God.

Now this is why Jesus states that He that loveth his life will lose it, because in the love of the world and the things in the world, a person cannot love God or Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus said: *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matt. 6:24)* There is no fence riding when it comes to being a Christian. One cannot be immersed in the world and the lust of the flesh, and at the same time be a child of God, and servant of Jesus Christ. Faith cannot dwell in such a heart, for it is driven from him by persistent sin. Let us all then recognize the will of God, that to grow in grace, we are dying to the world, and:

1. **Living to Christ.** We read verses twenty five and twenty six of our text: **read verses here.** There is a very large movement of some who call themselves Christian, but who teach doctrine foreign to the truth of Scripture. At the center of the movement is the idea that to be a Christian means that we will always be blessed to the greatest extent. In other words when you are converted God will immediately make your life better. You will cease to be poor, He will heal you illnesses, He will solve your problems, and the like. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. I say to both Lydia and Stevie today, that to be an adult Christian, and dying to the world. necessarily means that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. There is tribulation which you may expect to come throughout your life, and the only way to get through it is to lean on the Lord Jesus Christ to be your strength in those times. This is why Jesus says: *“The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple to be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?” (Matt. 10:24-25)* Jesus makes clear that the earthly life of a Christian will not necessarily be pleasant, but we have already seen that we are to die to this world, and so like Paul we count all these things as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of forgiveness and salvation in Christ Jesus. This means that we are, and should be, willing to part with everything in this life, that we might not lose the eternal life procured to us through the Gospel and faith. Therefore to both Stevie and Lydia I say, there is coming temptations to sin against God and to put away the faith which saves your soul. As Christians there is power within you to stand in the face of these things and overcome them. Pray that God would keep you faithful. Watch for temptation and avoid it whenever possible. Know that the devil will continually come after you, for he desires to have you and bring you to damnation. Stay in the Word, receive His Sacrament for the strengthening of your faith, and hold fast to the truth.

Now, again, these words apply to everyone. The cross we must bear is real, and is given to each and every Christian. Do not pretend or imagine that you are the only to endure these things. Share your burdens with one another and pray for one another that we might be strengthened through the Word of God. Many years ago there was a time when I had given up the faith of God and ceased to be a Christian. I tell you all this to show how it happens and that just because your parents or siblings remain in God’s grace, doesn’t mean that Satan will leave you alone. Take your own salvation seriously, it is not something to be played around with, as if we can take or leave it on a daily basis. We are Christians, that is disciples of Christ, let us then follow Christ and be His disciples in sincerity and truth. The reason I ceased to be a Christian those many years ago was not because my parents had failed, not because the Holy Spirit had failed in keeping me, but because I neglected my Bible, I neglected to hear the preaching I heard with my ears. I prevented its teaching from reaching into my soul. I neglected the study of God’s Word to a great extent, and I fell. Thankfully I have been restored to contrition and faith. Yet I often think about what danger I was in during that time, and that it was purely God’s grace that kept me from damnation. IU say this not to make anyone think that they can do as they please and still be saved, but rather to warn of the seriousness of what we do here. Do not neglect it. Do not consider that it is something you can take or leave at your convenience, but it is the greatest treasure which is given upon earth, value it more highly than anything else. Do not make my mistakes, for had I died during those years I would have been damned, forever without God, tortured and burning forever, without end. Be aware.

Now finally, I would like us all to take a serious interest in our own growth in grace, and in the upbuilding of this congregation. Let us work and pray for its health and vitality, and may God bless and keep us all until He shall return and take us all home to Himself in heaven. Amen.