

Sermon on John 14, 23-27, Confirmation, Pentecost, June 4, 2006

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Text:

23 Jesus answered him, 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. 25 'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Dear Congregation,
Especially: dear Confirmands,

1. What is Pentecost?

Now we have heard the reading and know a little bit about the story, in which the apostles suddenly experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. God sends it to them, and suddenly they are not afraid anymore, as they were all those fifty days when they had locked themselves in after Jesus crucifixion. Then they had seen and talked to the risen Christ and new what God could do, that he was even able to bring some back from the dead to transform him into a new being a new creation. They had been with Jesus when he was taken to heaven right in front of them. They had heard the command Jesus had given to them: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them and teaching them all which Jesus had commanded.

But so far that had not made much of a difference. The Apostles were still afraid; they were still without any clue how to accomplish that. If you think Tom Cruise in the three Mission Impossible Movies has difficult tasks to fulfill, think again. This is the real mission impossible, as it seems: Raging authorities, an anti-Christian opposition formed by a coalition of the powerful politicians and mighty religious leaders, no means of communication whatsoever, an unbelievable story to share which very likely no one will believe anyway, no resources, no money and a handful of people who in the past have disappeared as soon as the going got tough.

Then the turning point! God blows his Holy Spirit through this apartment in the attic of a house in Jerusalem – not a very fancy place – and they get all excited and fired up about God, they leave their room and they simply start talking about God and people get excited too, they hear them preach in their language and as this story unfolds at the end of the day another 3000 people are added to the church. From 12 to 3000 that's an increase of % 12.500 – I would love that for our church; especially after a Holy Communion Service where except the families and a few congregational members so many of you were absent.

(By the way, because every time people make comments about why we celebrate Holy Communion the night before the actual Confirmation, here for the last time an explanation: This simply allows us to have more time for this service, plus everyone is allowed to participate in the Holy Communion even before being confirmed after he or she had gained a basic understanding what Holy Communion is. That means that even a six year-old after having received some instruction on this subject matter would legally be eligible to participate – so much for clarification right here)

But let's go back to the text:

What a change. What a change in behavior on the part of the disciples who change from fearful to powerful. What a change for the congregation, when they change from a few to many. What a change in the perception of the past events which were believed as non-convincing and proof themselves now as something people

obviously have been waiting for!

2. What brings about this change?

Our answer of course is: The Holy Spirit, and that means that God himself is bringing about this change.

3. What does this mean for us?

a) First of all, this is a story of liberation: God liberates the disciples from all their fears, their doubts, their lack of self-confidence. This story is a miracle not because people see fiery flames above their heads and can talk in all kinds of languages, but because those fearful man receive the courage to do what they have to do.

See it is not that God is giving people 'Missions Impossible' because they can't do them anyway and God just wants to proof that he is almighty and we are not. God gives us tasks we can handle. If he asks those guys to go out ands preach he knew that they could do it, although they did not realize this themselves.

They are way to much occupied with themselves, they are way to self-centered.

A couple was traveling out West. They stopped at a sign that said, "Echo Point." "Try it," the wife suggested. "I think it's silly," her husband said. Finally he agreed to try it. He shouted at the top of his voice, "Baloney!" After a moment, he said, "See, nothing happened." "Try it again," his wife said. This time he shouted, "I'm the best looking man in the world!" Then the echo came back: "Baloney!"

Often comes back as an echo what we shout out.

And there is an important message for us:

- As long as we worry about ourselves we can not experience the liberating power of God. There is story told out of Persia about a General who had the strange custom of giving condemned criminals a choice between the firing squad and the big, black door. As the moment of execution draws near, the spies are brought to the Persian General, who asks the question, "What will it be: the firing squad or the big, black door?" One spy, faced with this dilemma, hesitated for a long time. It was a difficult decision. He chose the firing squad. Moments later shots rang out confirming his execution. The General turned to his aide and said, "They always prefer the known way to the unknown. It is characteristic of people to be afraid of the undefined. Yet, we give them a choice." The aide said, "What lies beyond the big door?" "Freedom," replied the general, "I've known only a few brave enough to take it."
- It is not that we have to have all the answers and all the things in place before we can go out a accomplish something or are able to change something. All depends that we can see in God the one who helps us while we go, who gives us ideas and accompanies us on our way and in our tasks. All it takes is faith and courage. The Theologian Paul Tillich wrote in his book 'A Courage to be', that the ultimate courage is God...and the courage to be – which means the courage to live our life – is rooted in the experience of God.

4. A Starting block not a finish line

Now, if you look at the front cover of the program I have chosen this picture of someone in the starting blocks. I think this is a good picture for a confirmation service.

To our four confirmands I say: It is not over, it never is. Although you won't come to my house anymore for lessons, which I will really miss, because I liked your open-mindedness and the discussions we had after some warm-up time, the learning experience when it comes to faith is never over. We are all in the same boat, that we might have some understanding of the bible and know a little bit about God, but that we can only learn a lot about God and ourselves, when we try to apply this to our daily life and when we seek for

situations where we let God into our lives and more important in our hearts.

Everyone who has been to a confirmation class knows that it is a little taking driving lessons to prepare for the license: You find it kind of interesting, and we might be happy when it's over, but the actual learning experience starts as soon as we drive in the car alone for the first time.

You yourself expressed that when I asked you to commend on your confirmation blessing which you have chosen for yourself. You said that we will feel discouraged at times or need people who cheer us up and help us.

This is reflected in the verses **Stephanie and Ella** have chosen:

Stephanie Boyce

Philippians 3:12 *I have not reached my goal, and I am not perfect. But Christ has taken hold of me. So keep on running and struggling to take hold of the prize.*

Ella Rinas

Psalms 25:4+5 *Show me your path and teach me to follow; guide me by your truth and instruct me.*

But you will never be driving your car alone. There will always be someone on the front passenger seat and give you, like a driving instructor good advice if you let him. This comes also very clearly out in the texts Annika and Allison have picked:

Annika Rinas

Joshua 1:9 *I've commanded you to be strong and brave. Don't ever be afraid or discouraged! I am the LORD, your God, and I will be there to help you wherever you go.*

Allison Ganter

Matthew 28:20 *I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.*

I do not know if you still have in mind what Jesus promised to his disciples and also to us. In the Gospel reading we listened to he says:

26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Dear Allison, Annika, Ella and Stephanie: God is with you, the Holy Spirit will be around you all the time. The teaching part is over; the only thing we can do is remind each other of this grace of God. Last question: How do we do that?

I had an idea. Basically God will be taking care of that himself. But – just in case – I want to give something to you who is small enough that it fits in every pocket. It is what you call a memory stick that computer English and the lay-men's term for USB Jump Drive. This is a little storage device for your computer which has already two things on it:

- An audio file with your confirmation blessing, which you can listen to once in a while to be reminded of the blessing God gives you today.
- And the entire bible, which you can load onto your computer and check texts out yourself.

I hope you don't delete them, but let God always be your operating system and your back-up. Amen.

And the Peace of God which passes all understanding, may keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.