

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Psalm 46
 Romans 3:19-28
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

KIDS' MESSAGE

Kids, there is a story about a little boy, way down in Florida, who ran out the back door of his house and jumped into a lake to go swimming. As he swam, his mother looked out the window and saw an alligator swimming toward him. She ran out of the house screaming for him to come back to shore. He started swimming toward shore as she ran down to the dock. The alligator was coming fast behind him.

Just as the little boy reached the dock, his mom grabbed hold of his arms to lift him out of the lake. But, at the same time, the alligator chomped onto his legs. Then a big tug-of-war happened. The mom pulled for all she was worth, but the alligator hung on and tried to pull the boy back into the lake. Fortunately, a farmer came driving along and saw what was happening. The farmer grabbed a rifle that he had in his truck and ran down and shot the alligator. Finally they managed to pry the little boy's legs free from the alligator's mouth and rush him to the hospital.

After the wounds on the little boy's legs had been sewed up, a reporter came to interview him about what had happened. The reporter wanted to see the cuts and scratches on his legs. The little boy showed his scraped up legs to the reporter. Then the little boy said, "**The alligator really cut up my legs when he tried to take me away. But, look at my arms. Mom scraped up my arms too, because she wouldn't let me go.**"

Kids, we live in a tough world where bad things can happen to us. Our parents, grandparents and others work really hard to watch over and keep us safe. **They will try to protect us from any trouble. So does God.** The little boy had scraped up legs from the attack of the alligator. Everyone has some kind of trouble that hurts us. But, the little boy also had **scraped up arms because his mom wouldn't let him go.**

Look at your legs, kids. Do you have any scrapes from bad things that have happened to you? Look at your arms, kids. Any scrapes? Older people may have scrapes on their arms and legs too. Sometimes, you just can't see them. **For sure, God is hanging onto each and all of us.** That's the **promise we receive in baptism.** Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Dear Confirmation friends, I am preaching this sermon **not just for you**, but also for your parents, Godparents, mentors, relatives and everyone else who shows up in worship this weekend. And I'm **not preaching** this sermon to **guilt anyone** into coming to church. **My goal** for today is to **lift up the promise that Jesus made to you** when you were **baptized**. On that day, Jesus **adopted** you into God's family. And **Jesus promised** to **love and care for you** every day of your **life** and for all of **eternity**. Do you believe that? What will Jesus' promise have to do with how you live your life starting right after worship is done today?

Your parents also made some promises the day you were baptized. They promised to **raise you in the Christian faith** – to share worship, Sunday school and prayers with you. . . and as I often say, **“to help you to come to know that God loves you way more than even they do.”** And the whole congregation promised to help them to **bring you to Jesus** and to **God's amazing love for you**. Today you make your own promises.

Eight hundred years before Jesus walked this earth; God spoke through the ancient psalmist to **comfort God's often worried and doubtful people**. In the midst of all of the world's troubles, ancient or modern, God says, **“Be still, and know that I am God!”** These words echo down through the centuries. Whatever happens to the people of God, God's invitation and promise is always, **“Be still, and know that I am God.”** God promises to be our **“refuge, strength, very present help in trouble...”** so that we **“need not fear.”** Or, in the language of our own day, **“I'm here for you. Turn to me. I will keep you safe.”**

Dear Confirmation friends, and everyone else, I'm not preaching this sermon today to **“scare the hell out of you”** – **talking about life and eternity**. I am preaching this sermon today to **firmly plant God's promise of abundant, joyful life** in you. That is a part of the promise God made to you when you were baptized. Today, confirmands, and each of us, **we get to claim and carry that promise** with us whatever we do, wherever we go, whatever happens to us.

Are things where you'd like them to be in your life? I'm not promising that a person of faith has no problems. Nobody is exempt from life's troubles – whether we bring them on ourselves, they are caused by some

evil power greater than ourselves or they are just a part of how nature works. Everybody experiences huge challenges in this life. It is just a matter of **whose turn** it is this week and then of what you are **going to do about it.**

- When money is short,
- When there are health problems,
- When you are struggling in an important relationship,
- When the world seems so dark,
- When alcohol or drugs have a strangle hold on you –

Do you face it alone or turn to Jesus? Do you remember God's promise? **"Be still, and know that I am God."** I'm here for you. Turn to me.

- When the sunrise greets and blesses your day,
- When the colorful leaves of fall lift your spirits,
- When you can clearly see how much someone loves you,
- When you have found your life partner,
- When you have experienced joy at the birth of a child -

Do you celebrate it alone or turn to Jesus? Do you remember God's promise? **"Be still, and know that I am God."** I'm here for you. Turn to me.

- When you could use a word of **forgiveness,**
- When you could use a word of **healing,**
- When you could use a word of **affirmation,**
- When you could use a word of **hope,**
- When you could use a word of **guidance** –

Do you face it alone or turn to Jesus? Do you remember God's promise? **"Be still, and know that I am God."** I'm here for you. Turn to me.

I start and end every day reminding myself that I **have been baptized** in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. That I am a **child of God.** And that **God is going to be with me** every moment of my day. Too often, during my days, I forget that God is there for me and try to take care of the world's problems all by myself. Too often every person here **forgets how much God loves us** and **tries to live as if there is no God.**

That's what some people say, **"There is no god."** They say, **"God didn't create you."** They say, **"Jesus didn't die for you."** They say, **"There is**

no Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart.” That’s what some say. Others show by their actions that they don’t believe there is a god.

Confirmands, parents, mentors, Godparents, everybody else – **what do you say?** You have to decide for yourself, every day. Do you **face the world alone** or do you **trust that God is there for you, walks with you** and **waits only to be asked** to **fill your life** with **God’s love and care?**

Dear young people,

- When you are trying to decide if you should consent to what your **date is asking** you to do,
- When you are thinking about what to do with **your life after graduation,**
- When you are facing a **college exam,** a life and death **military battle** or a **divorce** when you’ve only been married two years,
- When your friend says, “Taking this **heroin** will be so worth the risk,”
- When you find yourself **pregnant and unmarried** –

Will you face these things alone or turn to Jesus? Will you remember God’s promise to you at your baptism and again today? **“Be still, and know that I am God.”** I’m here for you. Turn to me.”

Hunter Miller and his dad, **Anthony,** made beautiful wooden crosses to give to each of Hunter’s fellow confirmands. They have **great big nails** on them. If you have the courage and the wisdom to hang your cross on the wall in your bedroom, or dorm room, or hunting shack - these nails will be an **excellent reminder** to you of **how much Jesus loves you.** Remember the nails in his wrists and ankles? Remember the scourging he received? Remember his words, **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?”** Those **big nails will remind you** that Jesus died, rose again, came back and said to you, **“I still love you. I forgive you. I won’t give up on you.** You’re **mine.** I will **never let you go.**” This is Jesus’ promise **“for you.”**

And **you may remember that promise** each time you witness a **baptism** or dip your own fingers in a baptismal font and make the sign of the cross on your forehead. And you may remember whenever you receive the **Body and Blood of Jesus,** given and shed for you, at the Table of the Lord. And you may remember whenever you **hear the Good News** of God’s great love for you preached from this or other pulpits. **Or you may**

forget Jesus' promise. Or you may **forget that God is moving to give you life every day.** And you may **forget to worship, thank and follow Jesus.** **But Jesus won't forget you.**

Confirmation Day – this **isn't about us showing up for church once in a while** when there is nothing else going on. This isn't about us **remembering to pray** whenever we happen to have trouble in our life. This isn't about us trying to be **good enough to go to heaven** when we die. This **is about us knowing that we are precious and beloved to God.** This is about us knowing that **God will always be there to give us life.** This is **about you deciding whether to trust God with your life.** You will never be **good enough.** You will never be **faithful enough** in worship, prayer or loving service. You will never **have all the answers.** But, **none of these will stop God** from **loving and caring for you.**

God created us to be in a **love-trust relationship** with God. There is a **great big hole** in each of our hearts that only God can fill. You can spend the rest of your life **trying to go it alone.** **Or you can listen.** **“Be still, and know that I am God.”** Every day it is up to each and to all of us to decide about **where we want God to be in our lives and families.** God has **already decided that you and each of us belongs in God's family.** The psalmist spoke God's promise 2800 years ago. **“The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”** God promised the people way back then and God promises us in our own chaotic, yet amazing world again today, **“Be still, and know that I am God.”** **Our God.** Thanks be to God. Amen.