

Sermon for June 7th, 2026
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 15:1-6

1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” **2** But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” **3** And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” **4** And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” **5** And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” **6** And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Psalm 33:12-22

12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!
13 The LORD looks down from heaven;
he sees all the children of man;
14 from where he sits enthroned he looks out
on all the inhabitants of the earth,
15 he who fashions the hearts of them all
and observes all their deeds.
16 The king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.
17 The war horse is a false hope for salvation,
and by its great might it cannot rescue.
18 Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,
19 that he may deliver their soul from death
and keep them alive in famine.
20 Our soul waits for the LORD;
he is our help and our shield.
21 For our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.
22 Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,
even as we hope in you.

1 John 4:13-21

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. **15** Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. **16** So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. **17** By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. **18** There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. **19** We love because he first loved us. **20** If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. **21** And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Luke 16:19-31

19 “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ 25 But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ 27 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ 29 But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 31 He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Our text for meditation this First Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Assurance and its Detractors

How do you know you are saved? If someone says with confidence that he knows he's going to Heaven, we say that such a man has *assurance* of salvation. He is not afraid of Judgment Day, with a confidence before our God that he will live eternally upon the great Day of Resurrection. Now, this assurance I speak of is not just a state of being: it is something we are *commanded* to have. The author of Hebrews binds our consciences to it, saying that we ought to have “the full assurance of hope until the end.”¹ Later on, he states it more strongly, “let us draw near with a true heart in *full assurance* of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”² Being assured of one's salvation is not negotiable. If we are to call ourselves Christians, we must know that we are saved. St. John tells us in our reading “whoever fears has not been perfected in love,” meaning there is something *deficient* in the man who does not have this assurance.

“But how are we supposed to do that?” you might wonder. It sometimes feels like everything out there is intended to tell us we are damned no matter how much we believe the Gospel. The denominations that deny justification by faith alone open up the possibility that believers simply have not done enough, have not confessed enough, and have not perfected themselves to such a point that they could enter Heaven. Anyone who takes that notion seriously will be worried sick their entire lives, for if we are being honest then we must confess that we sin every day. What can a mere man do to satisfy the demands of an infinite God, especially when we all fail Him every day?

Even if someone joins one of the magisterial denominations believing he can earn his justification and thus have assurance, then the institutional problem rears its head. You see my friends, while Rome and the orthodox both claim to be the one true holy and Apostolic church, at various times and places they have anathematized one another (as well as us Protestants). Admittedly, Rome is better

1 Hebrews 6:11

2 Hebrews 10:22

about this than they used to be, but there is still fierce debate about whether a Protestant or orthodox can be saved. Meanwhile most orthodox pronounce everyone but them to be damned. So if a man is prone to worrying over his salvation, in these churches he will find himself reeling over the thousands of hours that the magisterials have taken to make their cases, plus all the exclusionary competitive claims over which visible church gets the biggest share of Heaven.

This isn't me just beating up on the Catholics or Orthodox though, as being *Protestant* doesn't help us either when it comes to assurance. Many Protestant denominations have severe problems when it comes to assurance of salvation, most notably the calvinistic ones. The reformed teach that salvation depends on whether you are one of the elect, those whom God “predestined for salvation” for no discernible reason before the world was even created. In their conception of things, our Lord wrote up a decree and a list of names was on it that said “saved:” everyone else is damned, also for no discernible reason.³ The tricky thing is, no one knows for sure whether they are elect according to calvinist theology, because this farcical “decree” belongs to the secret counsel of God. So if someone asks how he can know he is saved their typical answer to the question of assurance is “work harder.” Do more works, believe harder, feel more pious, and then maybe by a process of emotional alchemy you can think you are saved...maybe. Calvin *also* formulated a doctrine called “evanescent grace” wherein God supposedly tricks someone into thinking they believe the Gospel so that He can damn them harder.⁴ So if someone holds to calvinistic doctrines of salvation, he has no way of knowing whether he is saved or not, and because of their “limited atonement” doctrine which denies the universal Atonement, they cannot know whether Jesus even died for them.⁵ Sadly, much of institutional “Confessional Lutheranism” has accepted the calvinistic frame regarding predestination, and so ends up with the same problem. Hundreds of millions of Christians, across every tradition there is, having to struggle with a creeping despair and the terror of thinking they might not be saved. And their denominations are actively tempting them to violate this command to take hold of the solace of assurance.

Gaining Assurance

So what is a Christian to do to get this assurance that Scripture so commands? It seems that we will not find the assurance of salvation with the theologians, denominations, or confessional documents. While these institutions can provide fantastic resources for learning deeper doctrinal truths, they are completely worthless when it comes to helping men obey the basic command to know one is saved. Therefore, we must go to the source of the commandment – the Word of God, plainly understood – to find our answer. With our reading, St. John provides it. Here are the basic things that we must acknowledge in order to know we are going to Heaven.

Baptism

St. John says “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.” To abide in God is to be saved, and to have the Holy Spirit is to abide in God. How do we receive the Holy Spirit? His indwelling presence is promised in Baptism. As St. Peter says, “Repent and be Baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of

3 Some calvinistic theologians claim that damnation is justified, because God damns sinners for their sins (which they believe He predetermined would happen), while forgiving those who He chose to be Christians (despite having committed many such similar sins as was predetermined in their own case). All this does is tell us that God would, if election works the way they say it does, damn some and save others for no discernible reason.

4 I'm not making this up. You can read more here:
http://www.examiningcalvinism.com/files/Articles/Evanescent_Grace.html

5 As an aside, it baffles me how they could even preach, if these men were consistent with their theology; if only regenerate men are supposed to preach, but no one knows whether they are regenerate, the calvinistic pastor really ought to just go behind the pulpit and shrug every Sunday. But I digress.

your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ From the moment you are Baptized, you can trust that the third Person of the Trinity is always with you, that you are forgiven of your sins, and you have eternal life.

Faith

Now, we know that there are false Christs out there and deadly heresies which threaten even the comfort of Baptism, so St. John says “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” To abide in Christ is to be saved, and to confess the true Christ is to abide in Christ. As St. Paul says in Romans, “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”⁷

Love

By love, St. John means *Agape*, seeking the good of others for their own sake and expecting nothing in return. St. John says “whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” This is the last step my friends. *After* you take comfort in the promises delivered to you in Baptism, and *after* you assert the holy and true faith in Christ Jesus our Crucified and Risen Lord, *then* you can examine yourself and your behavior. The kind of self-examination here is not done to find fault with ourselves and inspire greater fear, but to cheerfully verify the results of the previous promises we looked to from the Word. A man who is Baptized should expect the Holy Spirit to inspire greater works of love over time; a man who believes in the infinite mercies poured out with Christ's Blood on the Cross should expect that he will not hate his brother for whom Christ died. If he examines himself and finds himself *lacking* in these things, his sins are what is producing the fear – not that he is damned, but that sin produces fear, and it must be addressed by confession and absolution to remove that fear.

Conclusion

It is as simple as this my friends. Are you a Baptized believer in Christ? Then Jesus Himself says you are saved, as He tells the Apostles “whoever believes and is Baptized will be saved.”⁸ Every time we confess the Nicene Creed, that wonderful expression of the Gospel, we verify that we belong to God and are on our way to eternal life – so long as one *means* it when they make this confession. When we recognize this, then we may safely take up the full assurance which says “I am saved.” *Then* we go about checking the quality of our character and deeds, that we may either rejoice in what our Lord has done with us, or ask for His help and forgiveness where we are messing up – and all of this while still having that complete confidence that we are Heavenbound.

Someone might ask, “what about the future? How do I know I will *remain* saved?” Ah, but my friend you must focus on the present comfort and assurance. Christ tells us “do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.”⁹ If you know that you are saved, then let Jesus take care of the future and entrust yourself to Him; we receive this promise of His preserving power when we participate in the Sacrament of the Altar – yet another means by which He soothes our consciences and tells us He shall be the unwavering guardian of our souls. Let us be at peace and at ease my friends.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

6 Acts 2:38

7 Romans 10:9-10

8 Mark 16:16

9 Matthew 6:34