

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Baptized into Christ, we begin a journey of sorts in this life. It's a journey of confessing God Almighty, of walking before Him in righteousness. It's a journey of cross bearing and following Jesus. The journey is not easy. It requires you to deny yourself; it requires you to lose your life for Jesus' sake and for the gospel's. Along the way you will be called on to endure sufferings and tribulation for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

Like Abraham and Sarah, we are strangers and exiles on the earth — and to many people today, we seem stranger and stranger all the time, holding on as we do to the promise of a better country, a permanent home, our heavenly one. But so confess and so we sing, *"I'm but a stranger here. Heav'n is my home."*

Baptized into Christ, we begin a journey that takes us to our homeland, a place where we are *"no longer strangers and aliens, but [we] are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."* While in this life we are wanderers, living out of a tent, if you will, longing for our heavenly dwelling, *"a building from God,"* an eternal home in the heavens.

Indeed, baptized into Christ, you are being built together into this dwelling place for God by the Spirit. You are being built into a holy temple in the Lord, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Himself being the cornerstone. This is church language.

Be gone with this modern idea of spirituality that thinks you can be right with God and cast aside His church, as though you can define a spirituality of your own choosing—arrogantly, it seems to me—rather than humbly receiving what God in Christ has for you. Repent!

Oh, to be sure, there are visible instantiations of the church that are not very edifying, churches built, it seems on the mega-charisma of their pastor (no one would ever accuse Zion's pastor of that), churches being built on a new wind of doctrine supposedly being blown by the Spirit, a wind that blows in the opposite direction of the Holy Scriptures. One can understand the skepticism of people for these so-called churches. They're not being built on Christ the cornerstone, but on other crumbling foundations.

But the true church of Christ is one with Him, built on Him, built on His gospel, on the confession of His name, on the confession *"You are the Christ,"* as Jesus instructs the disciples in the Gospel of Matthew. And Jesus Himself is the builder, along with the Spirit.

In this way, then, the church father Cyprian of Carthage was right: *"there is no salvation outside the church,"* for there is no salvation outside of Christ. Indeed, Jesus says, *"whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous*

*and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

You see, one cannot separate Jesus Christ from the church, any more than you can separate the head from the body. Indeed, this is also how the church is described often in Scripture. The church is the body of Christ; Christ is the head. Therefore, the church submits to Christ and follows Him, even as our bodies go where our heads lead. Which is also why we are commanded to *“listen to Him.”* So that’s where our Christian journey takes us. That’s our path—we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ on the path where He leads.

And that path, inevitably, takes us to cross and suffering for the sake of Christ, for following Jesus means following Him through suffering and death to resurrection. It means losing one’s life in order to gain it. It means following Jesus through humility and shame and self-denial to forgiveness and life and salvation. And that, I was told this past week, is a process. I think that’s right. Although salvation comes as the Holy Spirit works faith in us to trust in Christ, our journey of sanctification can be bumpy. We grow along the path of suffering and cross. St. Paul says it this way, *“suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”*

Those of you who were here for Polly Hennig’s funeral might recall Pastor Jim Keller talk about a song that they sing at New Life Lutheran. It’s not in our hymnals, he said, referring to me, making sure I heard that. I did. So, I doubt we will be singing that song any time soon at Zion. Nevertheless, the song had a point, one that I’m making here today: that we are on a journey, and it talked about our attitudes along the way. We begin, it said, with the attitude, *“All of me; none of you,”* you here meaning God. That, it seems to me is man’s attitude apart from the Spirit, before baptism and faith. There were those at the funeral, Pastor Keller seemed to know, who were not Christians. In our narcissistic world, I’m sure you know many who have that same attitude: *“All of me; none of you.”*

In our walk, the song continued, we move to an attitude of *“Mostly me; some of you,”* trusting a bit more in the God who loves us and cares for us and seeks to lead us in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Then *“Some of me; mostly you,”* making progress, but not willing to deny ourselves completely. To finally, *“None of me, all of you.”* There it is: losing one’s life for the sake of Christ and His Gospel. There it is: not being ashamed of Jesus, but confessing Him boldly before men, trusting that He will confess us also before the Father in heaven. There it is: God’s love that has been poured into our hearts overflowing to the world around us, the Gospel pouring out of our lips that God’s love for us is shown to us in Christ Jesus, *“in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* There it is—God’s love: not that we in the church are perfect, but that we are holy because *“we have now been justified by [Jesus’] blood,”* and so *“we [are] saved by*

*[Jesus] from the wrath of God.*” There it is—God’s love to us: that we who were enemies have been “*reconciled to God by the death of his Son.*” Peace with God has been reestablished by Him “*who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*” Reconciled to God by Christ, we are now saved by His life and are given access to God by faith in every time of need.

This is the journey—we know the beginning and we know the end. The stuff in the middle can be challenging. Baptized into Christ, we are put on a journey along a path of faith laid out for us. We surely stumble along the way, for the devil, the world and our sinful flesh want to lead us on rugged detours off this well-lighted path. But thanks be to God, He seeks us out and finds us and dusts us off and stands us back on the Way through the Truth to the Life. Thanks be to God, that as we go through these trials and tribulations, we are actually built up in endurance and character and hope as we continue to look to Jesus. Thanks be to God that as we endure along this path of faith to the end, our hope does not disappoint us. We do know the end. Salvation is ours; and when Christ “*comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels,*” He will lead us to the house that He has prepared for His Father, the house built on Him, your eternal dwelling.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.