

Time to Testify!

☩ **Guided by the Spirit**
✠ **Accompanied by Christ**

In the Name of Jesus, who promises and sends His Holy Spirit, dear Confirmands and loved ones:

What we have before us today is nothing short of a miracle. The older I get, the more I appreciate how awesome this really is. How can any normal, proud human being confess guilt and sin deserving damnation from God? How can they find comfort in the conviction that all their sins were punished on God's own Son, that they are free of guilt and can live in God's love for time and eternity? But here you are all prepared to confess boldly that you believe the Bible. And it's not like some university professors try to tell their Christian students, "It's just your parents' faith." You have all invested countless hours to investigate the Christian faith, to see if Luther's Small Catechism stands the test of God's Holy Word. God's Book of Books has convinced you that what your Sunday School teachers taught is absolutely true for you too. God has worked this miracle of faith in your heart. All of us who love you give special praise to God for letting us see this miracle unfold. Today along with our dear Lord Jesus, we are asking and encouraging you to take up the most important task of your life: Now it's **Time to Testify!**

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"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4 NIV84) Hope is what Jesus' disciples needed so much that Maundy Thursday when Jesus first spoke the words of your Confirmation sermon text. He had been warning them about His suffering and death, but they just weren't getting it. After failing all the quizzes, now they faced the ultimate test. So Jesus was making sure they would have what they needed when they finally realized their sins of denial and forsaking the Lord. Jesus was going away, but they would never be alone. Like you in the years ahead, they would be **Guided by the Spirit**.

While other kids your age are so worried about popularity, you have a Friend who always comes in when everyone else goes out. He never gets upset and walks away, or worse, gets in your face about something. Jesus calls Him ***"the Counselor,"*** also translated ***"the Comforter."*** He always has a kind word for you, not from a distance, but with an arm across your shoulders like the loving Friend that He is. There's no doubt God the Holy Spirit will be there when you need Him. Jesus promises: ***"When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father...."*** Father and Son guarantee He's coming.

Once I was trying to share my faith with a college professor. She said condescendingly, "That's good *for you.*" Some of the smartest people refuse to believe what the Holy Spirit has convinced you is true. Like Pilate, they ask, ***"What is truth?"*** They're sure they're original thinkers, but they fall into the same trap as Eve when she doubted God's Word. She let the devil convince her she knew better than God. We would all miss the joys of heaven unless the ***"Spirit of truth"*** comes ***"to testify"*** about Jesus.

Your Confirmation passages testify God's truth to comfort you in the years ahead. Grant Gawrisch, many of us prayed for you when you were struggling as a newborn. And now God has brought you to this day. His ways are so mysterious and awesome. You're the only Confirmand to request an entire Psalm. Memorize Psalm 121, and God will grant more blessings to your heart. Faithful study is tiring but you can always remember your official verse: ***"Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."*** (Isaiah 40:30f NIV84)

My Confirmation was May 30, 1971 – almost ten years to the day before God let me marry my college sweetheart. I'm glad I did not know what trials and tribulations lay between those years. But Jesus kept His promise. Again and again He sent ***“the Counselor...the Spirit of truth”*** through my pastors and professors, through Christian parents and grandparents of classmates. Bethany Rose Valleau, you remind me of my adopted Grandma Rose, your great great grandmother. Rose Rabenberg lived her life like your verse: ***“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*** (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV84) One story to illustrate.

It was 45 miles from her son's farm into Wolf Point, Montana, only ten paved at the time. Grandma Rose did not like to be late to church. Through barbed wire fence gates we hurried. She put the pedal to the metal on gravel until we hit a cattle guard, a metal grate to let cars drive over, but not cows. I was in the back seat of the big old Ford Galaxy 500. Can't say for sure, but I believe we were air born. Scrunched up against the ceiling, I saw Grandma Rose hunched over the steering wheel. We came off that cattle guard, “ka-lunk.” All she said was, “I knew that was there somewhere!” and drove on. We got to church on time. Not that you should drive like that, Bethany, but her fearless attitude, her faithful determination – copy that. Know that God has plans for you and they're all good. Jesus rose, so you are...

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Adam Jeffrey Kannas, did you know you're named after a president? Don't expect folks to be impressed. Your father, Jeffrey Kannas, is President of New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church, Shoreview, Minnesota. People tend to look down on small things, much like the nations despised the Israelites coming to the Promised Land. Little did general Joshua know all those nations would gang up on Israel. But in spite of such challenges that lie ahead, you too can find strength and courage in your special word from God: ***“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”*** (Joshua 1:9 NIV84)

Ethan, Ethan, what will you chase? Or what will chase you?

A British warship commander named Thomas Watts was once chased by a tiger in India. Watts ran into a river, but turned to see the tiger swimming after him. So he grabbed the tiger by the head and forced it under water until it drowned. Such was the courage that carried his son Isaac Watts through religious persecution in England. It also empowered his grandson Isaac Watts junior to write hymns like *Joy to the World, Our God Our help in Ages Past, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* and 600 others.¹

My hope and prayer for you, Ethan, is that you will chase the things of God as He reveals them in His holy Word. Continue on this path, and you will keep living up to your awesome verse, the last thing the Lord's Apostle Peter was inspired to write to Christ's church: ***“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”*** (2 Peter 3:18 NIV84)

None of us dare stay where we are in our faith life. We need to keep growing onward and upward in Christ, or else the tiger of worldly concerns can drag us into the muddy river of sin and self. But come worship faithfully and be reminded God made you His own: Baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Confess your sins together, receive Absolution from the pastor as from God Himself. As often as we receive Christ's body and blood of the New Covenant, then depart in peace – we are testifying and growing ***“in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”***

Accompanied by Christ, all of you will be chased by God's forgiving grace. As David wrote: ***“Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.”*** (Psalm 23:6) And as Isaiah says in another place, ***“The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”*** (51:11 NIV84) Now that you're being confirmed, it's **Time to Testify!** Grace be with you. Amen.

¹ Morgan, Robert J. *On This Day*. Copyright © 1997. (Thomas Nelson, Inc.) Used by Permission. <http://www.Laridian.com> .
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