

YOU ARE MY ROCK AND MY FORTRESS
Sermon for Confirmation Day 2020
Psalm 31:3

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is taken from Psalm 31:3: **“For You are my Rock and my Fortress; for the sake of Your name, lead me and guide me.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ, and especially Nate, Peter, Hayley, and Libby,

Today is a day of sacred joy for the four of you, but what a joy it is for Jesus, your God and Saviour, who has redeemed you with His blood, when you renew your baptismal covenant with Him! There is much rejoicing among the angels in heaven when you make your vow to remain faithful to Him. Furthermore, it gives the congregation here at St John’s Aubigny much joy to hear you publicly join in the confession so sacred to them and to invite you to partake of the Lord’s Supper. It is also a day of rejoicing for your parents when they see in your confirmation the answer to their prayers, the fruits of loving care and training. And of course, Nate, Peter, Hayley, and Libby, it is a day of sacred joy particularly for you. Being united to Christ’s death and resurrection through holy baptism, the bonds have been strengthened as you have gone through a course of instruction, and now today, you are being given the high privilege of partaking of the Lord’s Supper with your fellow believers in Christ, who have an especial oneness with each other as members of His one body, the Church. Communing together is a confession of unity in faith, and so, when you come forward today and kneel at the altar with them, you are publicly proclaiming that you are one in confession with them. As the Apostle Paul writes, *“Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body. For we all partake of the one bread”* (1 Corinthians 10:17).

However, no matter how joyful this day is for you or others here today, not everyone is happy. Satan is not pleased. He is not happy when in a world full of sin, you are not making a promise to follow this world of sin, but a promise to remain faithful to the Lord. When you do this, Satan, who likes to prowl around like a roaring lion, seeking

someone to devour¹, feels a sharp arrow pierce into his wicked heart. The world also is not too impressed when you reject its sinful ways and vow allegiance to God, whom it hates.

Nevertheless, all of us who have your true welfare at heart pray that this day will be one of great and enduring blessings to you, even as the enemies of your soul will do all in their power to rob you of your faith and deprive you of your soul's salvation.

Now, although today, you are being confirmed, confirmation itself does not save. While I have no doubt that you are sincere in your confession of the Lord as being your Lord, and that you have true faith in the Saviour and are well on your way upon the journey that leads to eternal life, nevertheless, the goal has not yet been reached. You still have an uncertain part of your journey through life ahead of you, and, as Jesus reminds us, "*The one who endures to the end will be saved*" (Matthew 24:13).

The way through life for a Christian is not a sheltered, secure and pleasant road. Instead, it is a narrow and steep path full of difficulties and hardships and trials and dangers. Satan is lying in wait at every turn to capture and murder souls. The wicked world in which we live has its traps set all around, trying to ensnare us into sin and unbelief. Plus, we all have within us an enemy, the Old Adam - that part who is too much inclined to give way to the deceit of Satan and to give in to the wickedness of the world.

So, therefore, the question for you Nate, Peter, Hayley, and Libby is, "Will you continue your journey through life, hoping to finally receive the *goal of your faith, the salvation of your soul*?" (1 Peter 1:9). Really, this is a question we may all ask of ourselves, and if we depend on our own reason or strength, then the prospect is hopeless, and the goal is utterly unattainable. Many throughout history make their confirmation vows only to forget them and follow the ways of sin and unbelief, which is a most compelling testimony to the awful power of Satan, the world and the flesh.

Praise God then that there is One who is able to help and save, One who is able to guide us safely through our journey in life, one who can lead us to our heavenly destination, and it is He to whom the psalmist addresses the prayer of our text which reads: "**For You are my Rock and my Fortress; for the sake of Your name, lead me and guide me.**"

The writer of this Psalm was David, a man of good family. Indeed, the Lord had said to Samuel: *Fill your horn and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of*

¹ 1 Peter 5:8

Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king" (1 Sam. 16:1). David was well reared; he was of sound character and possessed great courage. He was a highly gifted writer of psalms, an astute statesman and a true friend. He was a noble adversary, a mighty warrior, the greatest king of Israel, an ancestor of the Lord, and a man after the heart of God. The list goes on.

Now from all of this, you would think that if ever there was a man who could walk with the Lord faithfully all through his life, it was David. However, none knew better than David himself how weak and helpless he was by himself. He knew he was a sinful mortal. In Psalm 51:5, he said: *"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."* He knew that he could not journey through life alone and without aid. Therefore, he prayed: **"For You are my Rock and my Fortress; for the sake of Your name, lead me and guide me."** Here was a beautiful confession of his own weakness and helplessness.

Now, what does the example of David show us? It shows us that no matter how well born, how well bought up we are, how good our character, how great our natural gifts, how good we were and are educated, how well we know the Scriptures, how great our determination, we cannot go through life alone and unaided to reach the heavenly goal finally. The way of life is *too difficult* for any of us to go it alone. Jesus Himself says: *"Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it"* (Matthew 7:14). Not that God makes it hard for a man to find, for Jesus again says: *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me,"* (John 14:6). God would help all men to find that way, but the natural man simply cannot, and does not want to see the correct way. The apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians said: *"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned,"* (1 Cor. 2:14). Human reason and understanding often run contrary to the directions of God's Word. Being taught the way to life, we must know the answer to the question "What must I do to be saved?"²

Satan will try his hardest to rob of that knowledge, to make each one of us blind to the true way, to confuse, and to make us go the way of unbelief or false belief. He further uses the world in his wicked task. He uses false teachers, false signs and anything else that he can get his hands on. And the fact that we all sin every day, the fact that we continue to do things even though we know that we shouldn't, shows us that we cannot go the way of life alone and unaided. The Old Adam will be only too

² Acts 16:30

ready to leave the way of the cross in favour of the ways of the world. So many times, people who once went the way of the cross have fallen into the hands of the devil simply because they did not have the strength or determination to persevere.

The way of life is hard to walk, but God's ways are mercy and truth.³ True and lasting happiness can only be found if you walk in them. Nate, Peter, Hayley, and Libby, if you let God rule your life, then you will be blessed. Psalm 1 tells us that *"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of wicked people, stand in the path of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers!"*² *Rather, his delight is in the Instruction of the LORD, and on His Instruction he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*" So, when you consider what lies before you on your journey through life, confess your weakness and helplessness and ask God **"for the sake of (His) name,"** to **"lead me and guide me,"** and be assured that this is what God will do, if only you let Him.

"For You are my Rock and my Fortress; for the sake of Your name, lead me and guide me." David despaired of himself. He trusted in his God and Saviour. He clung to the **Rock** who alone gives strength and stability, a **Fortress**, a protection against all enemies. David prayed: **"lead me and guide me."** The confidence David had did not rest on any merit or worthiness of his own. No, **"For the sake of Your name,"** he prayed. David knew that God was as kind and merciful as He is mighty.

The hymn we are going to sing immediately after this sermon, *"Take thou my hand and lead me"* is rather fitting. This is a wonderful prayer of a trusting child, a prayer of confidence and trust on your part: YOUR God, YOUR Saviour, YOUR Rock, YOUR Fortress. In Him is strength and stability. With Him is safety and protection against all enemies. Pray to Him to lead and guide you, not because of any merit or worthiness on your part, but for His name's sake. Despair of yourself; trust in Him. God is ever ready to show you the way you must go through His Word and Spirit. He will help you overcome the doubts and objections of reason. He will protect your faith against Satan and his false prophets. He will sustain you in trials. He will strengthen you in faith. He will lead His flock to green pastures and still waters.⁴

So, for the four of you, when you are in doubt, or temptation surrounds you, pray to the Lord. When sorrow and tribulation come, when weariness overcomes you, pray to your Saviour. He will not fail you. He will heed your prayer and lead and guide you

³ Psalm 25:10

⁴ Psalm 23

through all dangers and hardships and sorrows and temptations, giving you rest and relief on the way. *“Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden, and I shall give you rest!”* ²⁹ *Take My yoke on you and learn from Me! For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ³⁰ *For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light”* He says (Matthew 11:28-30).

Entrust yourself to God’s care and guidance. Regularly go to the source of help and strength, Word and Sacrament. You will find that He is your Rock and Fortress, that He will lead and guide you aright. You are a member of God’s kingdom. Let Him take you by the hand and lead you.

And finally, Nate, Peter, Hayley, and Libby, as you come to the Lord’s Table today, our prayer is that you would receive God’s forgiveness offered freely there for you. Christ Himself is truly present in the Sacrament, because a most intimate communion takes place between Christ and the communicant because the Sacrament is an expression and confirmation of the spiritual fellowship which unites all disciples of Christ. Receive it often through regular and frequent attendance. By doing so you are not only letting God lead and guide you, but you are receiving a deepening of your spiritual union with Christ and the strengthening of your fellowship with the brothers and sisters of this congregation. May your confirmation be a blessing to you. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lord God, You are eternally faithful and true to Your Word. You have kept every one of Your great and precious promises. Today we again come before Your throne of grace in gratitude for all Your goodness, in particular, for the gift of Jesus Christ Your Son, and for all the rich blessings we have received in Him. We thank You that He has accomplished our rebirth and salvation when it was humanly-speaking impossible. We thank You that in His life and being we see Your glory, that in the truth, goodness, and love He showed we see Your mercy and love, that in His obedience even to death on a cross we have forgiveness of sins, that in His resurrection from the grave we have the assurance of our own resurrection to life everlasting, and that in His ascension to heaven we have in Him One who brings before You all our needs.

Renew us day by day by Your Holy Spirit, that we may firmly believe in Jesus, love and serve Him, and show His saving power to others in all we think, do, or say. Free us from all love of earthly values, and strengthen our hope in Your promises. Make us more trusting in your mighty power and grace. Deepen our sympathy and love for all people,

and remove every trace of selfishness. Keep us firm in Your truth to the end of our days. Enable us all to build one another up in common mind and purpose.

Heavenly Father, guard Your Church from false and disloyal preachers. Keep it obedient and faithful to all the teachings of Your Word. Enable us to acknowledge the work of Your Spirit through the Gospel wherever it is. Refresh us by Your Spirit, that we may remain in living fellowship with Jesus Christ, proclaim Your truth with living power, and minister to the needs of people around us with living compassion. Continue to bless the AELC and the ULMA with Your gifts.

Give peace and harmony to the nations of the earth. Enable people everywhere to live without fear or want, and free them from all oppression, injustice and cruelty. Influence all in our land to live in uprightness, and overthrow all evil. Help those who set their minds on earthly pleasure and material prosperity to see that there is no lasting value in them. Protect us from spiritual decay, and strengthen those who warn us of moral danger. Save us from every danger within and without, and help us to live under Your continued favour and blessing. We thank You for the apparent easing of covid-19 in our nation, and pray that in time, all nations on earth would finally be free from the illness and death it has brought.

Live in our homes, O Lord, and be the head of our families. Prove Yourself a helper in every time of need. Bless the weary, the sick, the troubled, and the sorrowful, that they may look to You as the unfailing source of all healing and hope. If it is Your gracious will, please send for rain to refresh and renew the parched land.

O faithful and gracious Lord, today you are giving Nate, Peter, Hayley, and Libby the special joy of publicly confessing their faith and renewing their dedication to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Give them Your strength and courage to make this confession with sincerity, and to fulfil it in the days ahead. Remind them of their baptisms and of the covenant You made with them on that day. Keep them faithful until the end of their lives, that they may obtain the heavenly crown. Keep them in Your grace and make their hearts the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, so that He may direct Nate, Peter, Hayley, and Libby in the paths of righteousness.

We offer You our prayers and our songs of praise, heavenly Father, in the name of Your dear Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and honour for ever. Amen.

The 19th Sunday after Pentecost
(Proper 23)

Isaiah 25:6-9

⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet with aged wines, rich foods full of marrow and refined, aged wines. ⁷ On this mountain He will destroy the surface of the shroud that is covering all peoples and the blanket that has been woven over all nations. ⁸ He will swallow up death for ever. The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces and remove the disgrace of His people from the whole earth. For the LORD has spoken. ⁹ On that day people will say: “Look! This is our God. We have been waiting for Him to save us. This is the LORD, for whom we have been waiting. Let us rejoice and be glad that He has saved us!”

Philippians 4:4-13

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always! I shall say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all people! The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything but in everything make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving! ⁷ The peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, will also guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, my fellow-Christians, keep your minds on all things that are true, all things that are noble, all things that are right, all things that are pure, all things that are lovely, all things that are appealing and anything that is excellent

and praiseworthy! ⁹ Continue to put into practice what you have learned, received and heard from me and what you have seen in me! The God of peace will also be with you.

¹⁰ I am very glad in the Lord that now again you have revived your concern for me. You have been concerned but have not had an opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying that I need anything. For I have learned to be content in whatever situation I am in. ¹² I know how to be in need and know how to have plenty. In every way and in everything I have learnt the secret both of being fully satisfied and of being hungry, both of having plenty and of having too little. ¹³ I can do everything through Him who strengthens me.

Matthew 22:1-14

¹ Again Jesus used parables in speaking to them. He said: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding for his son. ³ He sent his servants to call those who had been invited to the wedding, but they refused to come. ⁴ Then he sent other servants and said to them, ‘Tell the people who have been invited, “Look here! I have prepared my dinner. My bulls and fattened calves have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding!’”

⁵ “However, they paid no attention and went away, one to his farm, another to his business; ⁶ and the rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ The king became angry. He sent

out his armies, destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

⁸ “Then he told his servants: ‘The wedding is ready, but the people who have been invited have not deserved to come.’⁹ Therefore, go where the highways leave the city and invite everyone you find to the wedding!’

¹⁰ “Those servants went out on the highways and brought in all the people whom they found, both bad and good. Then the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹ “When the king came in to observe the guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing a wedding garment.”¹² He asked him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ The man could not say a thing.¹³ Then the king told the servants, ‘Tie him hand and foot and throw him out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!’

¹⁴ “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”