

1 Timothy 6:12

Reformation Day / Confirmation Sunday

Lessons for the Day: Revelation 14:6-7; Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36

Don't Become an MIA!

October 28, 2018

“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

Dear friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed, and especially you, dear confirmands;

In Washington, DC there is a 2 acre site that houses the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, which has a wall with the names of the 58,000+ soldiers who died or who were unaccounted for—the armed forces personnel who are known as MIA's, or Missing in Action, referring to the servicemen whose fate remains unknown. MIA's could be soldiers who were killed in battle. They may have been captured. They may have deserted or suffered amnesia and got lost—no one really knows for sure. The MIA issue was a great tragedy of the war, and a cause of concern for many people. Even though it is more than 40 years since the war ended, the friends and families of these MIA's still hope that some of them will be found alive and well.

Just as sad as the MIA's in the Vietnam War are the number of MIA's from a war that is still being fought today—a war which all God's people must fight. In our text today, St. Paul refers to it as ***the good fight of the faith***. We fight the good fight when we, the people of God, cling to His truth when the world around us tries to lead us away from God. We fight the good fight of faith when we struggle against the temptations to sin and against the devil's evil influence in our lives. We fight the good fight when we boldly confess the faith that is in our hearts, and live like people we are—people who have been set free from sin and death through Christ's death and resurrection for us. But what often seems to happen is that many Christians become MIA's, people who are missing in action when it comes to living out the faith they say is in their hearts. That is why, on your Confirmation day, I encourage you to be faithful in your struggle. More importantly, I hope and pray that you will not become an MIA Christian, missing in action in terms of your relationship with the victorious Lord of Life.

Over the past two years of confirmation instruction, we have been helping you prepare, as one of the hymns says, to ***Fight the good fight with all your might***. (LSB 664, st. 1). We have given you some of the training that will help you in the struggle. That training isn't finished yet, for you must continually train and prepare to battle a very fierce and treacherous enemy. The bible says: ***“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”*** (Ephesians 6:11-12, ESV) Our enemy is the devil, who would like nothing better than to see us give up on God, and to give up all the blessings that God wants to give us. It's a strange paradox: on the one hand, the war is over, because the devil has been defeated. When Jesus gave His life for us on the cross, and then rose to life again, he defeated all the evil power of the devil. And through faith, Jesus' victory is our victory. But even though we have won the war, the devil is so stubborn that he keeps on fighting against God's people. Maybe he can't win, but that isn't going to keep him from trying.

That is why we, as people who know what Jesus has done to set us free, need to fight the good fight of faith. I know from my own experience and from the experience of other Christians that in the days and weeks ahead, you are going to find yourselves involved more and more in a struggle of faith. That is why I do pray for you young people. We pray for our youth in our office devotions, because we see the way in which the devil is at work to mislead you and to deceive you. We pray that God would give you His Spirit to help you see through the devil's evil ways. We pray that you would ***“be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”*** (Ephesians 6:10, ESV) We know, because we feel it, too, that the devil is going to do anything He can to lead you away from God. He will do anything He can to get you to forget the life God gave you in your baptism. He will do anything he can to make you forget the promises that you will make today. He will try to attack you through the music you listen to, the movies you go to, the tv shows you watch. He will use all those social media apps to ridicule God or to tell you that God doesn't matter. He will try to convince you that what counts is what you want out of life—and if that is different than what God says in the bible and what you have learned in confirmation, then the bible must be wrong. He will try to convince you that if everyone else is doing it, it must be okay. Again, we see how God's will for our sexual identity has been corrupted by the world. The value of life has been set aside through abortion and euthanasia. Even the legalization of marijuana is a reminder that what matters to the world today is not what is good or healthy or wise, but people just want what they want.

If that isn't hard enough, the devil will work through some of your friends, who will tell that you are crazy for going to church.

As you advance in school, you will very likely have professors who tell you that God does not exist, and that man is all that matters. But most of all, if he can, the devil will make you an MIA Christian—one who is missing in action. He will try to convince you that you don't need to go to church, that you don't need to listen to God's word, that you don't need to live as a believing child of God. The devil will try to convince you that you are being a faithful part of God's family if you at least acknowledge that there is a God, or if you get to church at Christmas and Easter. He will tell you it isn't necessary to resist evil and to struggle against temptation: without ever telling you that in doing so you are surrendering to him and will suffer the same fate that the devil will suffer when Jesus comes in final victory at the end of the world.

Sadly, even though this war truly is a matter of life and death, we often become MIA's in this spiritual struggle. If you look at the number of people who call themselves Christians, but then compare the number of people who actually live by faith in Jesus Christ, you soon realize that many so-called Christians are missing in action. It's a temptation and a problem that we all have to deal with at times in our lives. We let the world tell us what is important. We let everything else occupy our time and our energy. Instead of resisting what is wrong, we give in to it. We are missing in action, and the devil has beat us by our very indifference to the struggle.

In just a few minutes, you are going to stand before this congregation and before the Lord and make what St. Paul calls in our text *the good confession*. You are going to confess your faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You are going to say that you are ready to get involved in the battle, that you will struggle against the devil and stay ready for action as part of God's family. But those promises won't mean anything if, after you are confirmed, you stop learning and growing and training through worship and bible class. That has always been one of the saddest things for pastors: to see the number of young people who celebrate their Confirmation Day, but somehow think that they've done everything they need to do, and give up on the church once they are confirmed. It's just as sad when any person who knows the hope and life that God gives us in Christ gives up that close relationship with Him for the things this world offers: for those empty, meaningless things the devil pretends to offer. That's why, if there is one thing I hope you and every one gathered here will learn from your Confirmation day, it is this: Don't be missing in action when it comes to your relationship with God and with His family in the church. Be faithful in your worship. Come regularly to communion. Come to bible class. Get involved with the youth group. Help out where you can in the church. And when you aren't here, live like the Christian you are confessing to be. Show through your love for others, through your honest, caring and faithful actions at school, at work and at home that you understand what it means to be forgiven through Christ and what it means to be part of the Lord's army, resisting the evil of this world.

I know that it's not always easy to fight the good fight, but it is worth it. For one thing, we should remember that we are fighting a winning battle. Through faith in Christ we cannot lose. He already fought the battle through the life He lived for us. The devil thought he had won when Jesus died on the cross for our sins, but the battle wasn't over. On Easter morning our Lord showed who was greater, as He rose again from the dead. We sang that great Reformation hymn, written by Martin Luther—a man who knew what it was to be involved in that good fight of faith. Luther knew the truth of the words he himself wrote: *“With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected; But for us fights the valiant One, Whom God Himself elected. Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, Of Sabaoth Lord, And there's none other God; He holds the field forever.”* (LSB 656, st. 2) Jesus will give us the help and strength we need to stand firm in our faith. He will give us His Spirit to help us deal with the temptations that come our way. He will help us to be the people we can be through faith. And everything will be all right in the end.

There is an old saying, “to the victor goes the spoils”. Our faith in Christ means we share in His victory over Satan. In our text, Paul encourages us to take hold of the eternal life to which we are called. When Jesus died on the cross to take away our sin, He brought us the forgiveness that makes it possible for us to live in heaven. Then, through His resurrection He gave us the sure and certain hope of victory over death itself. When we get to heaven, we will truly appreciate how much God has done and is doing for us. But we will miss out on the glory of victory if we are MIA—missing in action. I pray, dear confirmands, and for all our people, that we will faithfully fight the good fight of faith and stay in top fighting shape through continued training around the Word of God. You will find that this is one struggle that truly is worth the effort. Amen.