

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



2 Corinthians 13:5-6 *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?-- unless indeed you fail to meet the test! ⁶ I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.*

“EXAMINATION.” The word itself can be a little bit intimidating, especially if there’s a lot on the line. If you’re taking a final exam in a particularly difficult class, well, perhaps the word “examination” reminds you of that thick stack of sheets sitting upon your desk with all of the various questions that need to be answered in the allotted time while your anxious nerves are racing as you sit waiting for the teacher to say, “You may begin.” For the two young men being confirmed before you today, as they embark upon their teenage years, “examination” is a word that they’ll be considering a lot more over the next half-decade. Their lives will be full of such tests: there are the end-of-the-year exams they currently are sitting through to finish the eighth grade, there will be the various end-of-semester exams to be completed once they reach high school, and there will be the driving tests which they’ll eventually have to pass in order to get their driver’s licenses.

Such tests can be an unnerving experience, particularly when there’s a lot riding on such exams—when failing the driving test means you’ll have to wait even longer to finally get your driver’s license or when your overall final grade in a certain class can be affected adversely by doing poorly on the final exam. Or perhaps, it’s even more serious than that. For some, getting a good grade on the final exam may even mean the difference between graduating or not.

Now, I know from talking to Hayden, he’s been taking his final exams before finishing off the eighth grade, and it’s been decided that his final exams don’t count this year. What with all of the missed school days and online learning over the past year or so, the powers-that-be have decided that it’s unfair to hold poor performance on the final exams against him and his classmates. As for us here today, both Hayden and Mason are undergoing an examination of sorts, and it’s a nerve-wracking process for both of them, I know, as they face their family and friends and congregational members and answer questions concerning their faith. However, their graduation, so to speak, is not on the line. I’ve assessed each of them to be prepared to become communicant members here at Immanuel Lutheran Church, so this isn’t that type of examination. Any forgotten answers today aren’t going to be held against them.

However, sitting here and listening to these two young men answer the questions to their confirmation examination does present the opportunity for every congregational member to follow the Apostle Paul’s directions in our text for this morning, when he wrote, **“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”** And what a wonderful occasion to do just that on this Sunday in which we’re celebrating Christ’s Ascension. It’s very fitting, because Jesus’ Ascension into heaven reminds us that He will return for the greatest final exam of them all: “Will we graduate from this life into life eternal?”

We have an opportunity this morning to study for that final exam. And since Jesus is currently sitting at the right hand of the Father in glory, the question is: “Will we join Him in glory on the last day as well?” To that end, I have for you this morning a simple self-examination test. Three simple questions,

three statements actually, and all you have to do is answer “True” or “False” to each one. And I pray that the answers that we arrive at will remind us of our true hope for passing that great final exam upon Jesus’ return.

So I want you to ask each true or false statement of yourself, beginning with this statement: “I am the reason why Jesus descended from heaven.” In other words, the question is: “Was there something in me that made it necessary for the Son of God to leave the glory and power and majesty of heaven and humble himself even to the point of death on a cross?” Was it something in me that made it necessary for the Son of God to suffer contempt, mockery, and pain—to give His very life on the rough wooden cross of calvary? Consider the statement: “I *am* the reason Jesus descended from heaven.” Is that true or is it false? It’s TRUE. It’s true for each one of us. Each of us must confess: “It was *my* sins that offended the Holy God in heaven. It was my helplessness and great need that caused Jesus to volunteer for the job to take on human flesh and suffer and die in my place. Jesus was willing to descend in order to be my substitute on Calvary’s cross.” And so the answer to the first question is: True.

Here’s the second statement, true or false? “I am the reason Jesus *ascended* into heaven.” After His death, Jesus rose as He said He would on the third day. And He went up into heaven with the eyewitness of His disciples watching as He went and the angels standing by saying, **“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”** (Acts 1:11)

Can it really be true that He did that for you, *personally*? The answer again is a big capital “T.” True. For Paul writes to the Ephesians, **“He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.”** (Ephesians 4:10) And before Jesus did die and rise again, He told His disciples exactly why He was going to do these things. He said in John 14, **“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”** (John 14:2-3)

Did you catch what that means for you personally? Jesus not only descended, but died and rose again and *ascended* into heaven, with you in mind! He wants you to be by His side in glory following the great resurrection of the dead. So, both statement one and statement two are true! Jesus descended from heaven because of you, Jesus ascended into heaven once again because of you. And if you know these things are true, then what Paul says in our text is true of you as well. For he wrote: **“Do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?”** Yes, if you can answer from your heart “True” to both of those statements, “He descended because of you,” and “He ascended because of you”—then Christ is in you. And that ought to give you great confidence for the answer to the third of our statements in this Ascension Examination.

Here it comes. True or false? “I will follow Jesus today and always.” Now that’s a little bit different. The first two statements on this exam are about things that Jesus did. This final question is about something that has to do with you and your future. And by its very nature, it’s more difficult to be certain about future events, especially when we know ourselves so well. It’s the same question really that I’m going to have for our confirmands a bit later when they make their vows before the Lord. One of the questions goes this way: **“Will you live your life as a redeemed child of God and in faith, word, and deed, remain true to the Triune God—even until death?”** And the answer they’ll be giving to that question is this: **“I do so intend, with the help of God.”**

Can *you* be so bold as to say, “I will follow Jesus today and always, right through to the end”? We can’t know the details of the future. And one thing we *do* know is the state of our own hearts and how often we fall short of God’s expectations. How can we be so sure? Well, in ourselves, we could never be confident; but in Christ—guided by Him, informed and inspired by His true Word—the answer is “True.” Most certainly true. “I will follow Jesus today and always.”

And the key is this: you need to stay *with* Him, the One who passed every test for us. Stay close to Him through daily reading and study of His Word. Stay close to Him through gathering together on regular basis to share that word with fellow believers. Be the branch to the vine as Jesus said in John chapter 15, ***“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*** (John 15:5)

There’s the rub. WITHOUT Jesus—no hope. WITH Jesus—every confidence. With Jesus, we proudly and boldly say, as Paul did to the Philippians, ***“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*** (Philippians 4:13)

So, there are your three true or false statements, and their three answers. That’s the happy conclusion to your Ascension Sunday examination. It so happens that all three statements, in Christ, are true. He descended from heaven on a mission of mercy on your account. He re-ascended into heaven to pave the way for you to follow. And now, when you are abiding in Him as a branch to the vine, each of us can say, “I will rise too. I will follow Jesus today and always.” May God grant it to each of us and especially to you Hayden and Mason. Amen.