

“Yes, with the Help of God!”

Sermon for Ascension Day and Confirmation Day

Sermon Text: 1 Kings 8:22-28



*Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven,<sup>23</sup> and said, “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like You, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart;<sup>24</sup> You have kept with Your servant David my father what You declared to him. You spoke with Your mouth, and with Your hand have fulfilled it this day.<sup>25</sup> Now therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for Your servant David my father what You have promised him, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.’<sup>26</sup> Now therefore, O God of Israel, let Your word be confirmed, which You have spoken to Your servant David my father.<sup>27</sup> But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built!<sup>28</sup> Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that Your servant prays before You this day...*

One morning a few years ago, someone decided to lock the gates of our church with a bicycle lock. Underneath, the person then wrote: “God has moved!” I would have liked to know from the person what they meant by this sentence. I assume that they meant that God is no longer to be found in the church, but somewhere else. In fact, there is just such a moving day on which Jesus moved away from the visible world into the invisible dwelling place of God. This happened on Ascension Day. Many people want to know where exactly this place is, where Jesus now lives and what His address is. In our sermon text from the Old Testament, we are introduced to Solomon who was concerned with precisely this question: Where is God? Solomon built a beautiful temple for this purpose. The text we just read describes the situation when the temple had just been completed. At this moment, something amazing happens. Solomon stands before the altar of the Lord in the temple, spreads out his hands in prayer, and realizes that God cannot be caught, not even within a temple made with hands. *“Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built!”* Solomon asks God. And then he continues to pray to God: *“Yet have regard to the prayer of Your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God...”* The amazing thing about Solomon’s prayer is that he knows how close God is, even though God cannot be contained. He prays to God and speaks to Him, knowing that God is very nearby. This is exactly what confirmation is all about. We want to know and believe that God is near, we want to believe that God also lives within us.

Dear congregation and confirmands, you have also confessed your faith in God. It is humanly understandable to ask where the God you have professed your faith in is. But even more important than this question of where He is, is the question of by what right and by what power you can confess and then pray to God. On your confirmation day, we celebrate Jesus’ ascension into heaven. Jesus’ ascension doesn’t give you the certainty of where God is but the certainty that God is with you and that He answers your prayers. Ascension Day gives you the certainty that God is in you because Jesus’ ascension isn’t a departure, but an entry! Entry into the presence of God! There, where Jesus is now at the right hand of God, interceding and praying for you. Everything that Jesus did through the cross and resurrection is confirmed and sealed by the ascension. And all of that is for you! That is why you personally confessed this and were thus confirmed. To confirm or rather confirmation has something to do with

acknowledgement. You said with your words and with your mouth: “Yes, I believe” or “yes, with the help of God.” So you said your “yes.” You said “yes” to what your godparents and parents said for you many years before at your baptism. I also find this word “to confirm” when I have to type in my password at the bank, for example. It comes up when the bank portal says: “Confirm that the password is correct.” In English, the word is “confirm” and it is closely related to the word confirmation. Do you now confirm that you believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? That is what you have done today. You have not said: No, wrong password, I need another one, but you have confirmed what your parents and godparents did before. Yes, it is correct, I believe this too.

Like Solomon from our sermon text, we now spread out our hands and pray to God. We pray that God, who cannot be grasped by heaven and earth, can still be in your life and that you can continue to believe in Him in the future. How can we and how can you confirm this faith in the future? How can you be certain that God loves you and will continue to hold on to your life in the future? We can’t give ourselves this faith, but we receive it from the One who sits at God’s right hand – from Jesus. And Jesus promises us: “I am and the way and the truth and the life” ... through Me you will surely come to the Father! So it’s about getting to know Jesus and we don’t just get to know this Jesus by walking in the woods and meadows, but by reading His words. In German, the word “certainty” also contains the word “knowledge.” By dealing with the knowledge of faith and the Bible, you gain certainty.

You have learned this knowledge of faith in confirmation class. It is important to repeat this content again and again, to increase this knowledge, to talk about it with others, and to pray. Your faith is like a fire and this fire needs wood to burn. The wood is the Word of God, which you read daily and which strengthens you. It is also important that you experience the fellowship of other Christians on Sundays and allow the body and blood of Christ to strengthen you regularly. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said: It is grace that a congregation may gather around the Lord’s Table. Not all Christians share in this grace. The prisoners, the sick, the lonely, the persecuted do not share in it. It is therefore an incomprehensibly great treasure that we are allowed to experience this grace here on Sundays.

The person who locked the gates of our church a couple of years ago probably didn’t know how to find God in the church and I wonder what they thought would be the place to find God. According to surveys, many people believe that there is a divine being. But most don’t know where to find this God. To be honest, just like Solomon, we are helpless in many matters and pray: “God, whom the heavens and earth cannot contain, where are You?” And that is exactly why you confirmands have not only said “yes” to your confirmation today, but “yes, with the help of God!” It is clear that we can’t freely say “yes” to God on our own. “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.” We need God’s help. We can ask for this help. We do this in the certainty that He has already said yes to us. His “yes” precedes our “yes.” His “yes” is the strength and the reason why we can say “yes” to God. Amen.