

June 3, 2007
Confirmation Sunday

Pastor Russell Lackey
Reformation L.C.
Exodus 20:2-3

I am your God¹

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

God's Decision

God has made a decision about you. He has not waited to find out how sincere you are, how religious you might be, or how well you understand the Bible. He has not even waited to find out if you are interested or willing to take his decision seriously. He has simply decided.

He did not decide without knowing anything about you, though. God knows you better than anyone else could – inside out, upside down, and backwards. He knows where you are strong and where you are weak, what you are most proud of and what you are most ashamed. But that hasn't stopped him. His decision is made.

In Exodus 20:2, he comes straight out and says to you, "I am the LORD your God." That is his decision – to be your God. He is not content just to be the kind of God who hangs stars in the night or once upon a time created Adam and Eve. In his love and grace, he has decided to be *your* God.

This is not the first time he has said it, either. God first announced his decision about you when you were baptized, when you could not do anything besides eat, burp, and gurgle. "You," he said, as the pastor spoke your name, "are baptized in my name. I am your God."

He has said that same thing many times since then, too. Each time that you have read or heard his Word, he has stood behind it, repeating his promise to you. He will do it many more times throughout your life.

It is important to understand that this is not the word of some kind uncle in the clouds or a weepy grandpa in the heavens. This word is from God who made the heavens and the earth. This is the God, who in Christ, broke the grave for you, the God who has sent his Spirit to make you his own. So when he says, "I am the LORD your God," everything that is and could be is tied up in the promise.

In fact, his decision means life for you. He is the one who has given you your mind, body, and all your powers. He has also followed up these gifts with everything else you have needed to live from day to day. Because he has promised to be your God, you can count on him for everything good, all that you need as long as you live.

¹ This sermon was influenced by J. Nestingen and G. Forde's book, Free to Be.

His decision means forgiveness for you. Having decided to be your God, he takes you the way you are – with your strengths, gifts, talents, and abilities; but also with your bad habits, selfishness, pride, and whatever else you most want to hide. When God says, “I am the LORD your God,” he is not saying, “I will be your God only when you are good enough.” No. He is your God even when you are not good.

You can understand this. When you visit a doctor, your doctor does not say, “I’ll be your doctor when you are well, but don’t bother me when you are sick.” In the classroom, your teacher does not say, “I’ll be your teacher when you get good grades, but don’t come to me when you are failing.” In your family, your parents do not say, “I’ll be your parent when you are good, but don’t talk to me when you are bad.” In the same way, God has made his decision about you. You are his. When you are sick, you are his. When you fail, you are his. When you are bad, you are his.

Finally, his decision means a future for you. When God decided to be your God, he decided to be your God for all time. God does not stop being your God at age 18. He is your God forever. This is important because there will be many struggles in your life. But God will be with you through them all. The moment he said, “I am the Lord your God,” you were given a future without end.

Life, forgiveness, and a future given to you not because of something you have done but solely because of God’s decision. That is what God means when he says, “I am the LORD your God!”

The Two You’s

But wait there is more. After making this decision about you, God goes on to say, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” God must give these additional words because He knows that there are two you’s in you. The first you is the old you, the sinner. The second you, is the new you, the saint. The saint in you loves these words. The saint in you trusts God’s promise to be your God. It is the sinner in you that does not trust.

The sinner in you is the rebellious you. It is the selfish you. The sinner is called the old Adam because it is the rebellious nature passed on from Adam and Eve. The old Adam’s motto: “Me, myself, and I.” The old Adam wants to make you fear, love, and trust anything but God. One of the old Adam’s favorite idols is money. The old Adam will tell you, “If only you had lots of money, then you wouldn’t have to worry about things. Then you can really take care of yourself.” The old Adam does this so that you trust money instead of God.

In every Christian, there is a struggle between the saint and the sinner. Left to ourselves, the sinner always has the upper hand. You can see this in the story, The Lord of the Rings. In the story, Frodo has to destroy the ring of power in the fires of Mt. Doom. Frodo practically sacrifices life and limb to complete this task. That is the saint in him. But once he arrives at his destination, Frodo can not destroy the ring. The ring has cast its spell on Frodo. Instead of destroying the ring, Frodo takes it for himself. The sinner in him has the upper hand. The apostle Paul knew this truth as well. He writes, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19For I do not do the good I want, but

the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me” (Romans 7:18-20).

In the story, the only way the ring is destroyed is by outside help. If you remember, Gollum bites off Frodo’s finger, trying to get the ring for himself. In doing this, he falls into the fire and the ring is destroyed. Without this intervention, Frodo would have been lost.

This is exactly what God is doing in verses 2 and 3. God has decided to be our God. However, he knows our hearts are turned against him. God must kill the old Adam in us. God does this through the Word: the law and the gospel. The law tells us to have no other gods. We hear these words and try not to have other gods. However, the more we try, the more we realize that we have many gods. Once we see this, we realize that we can no longer trust me, myself, and I. We need another one to trust.

It is at that moment when God speaks the gospel. To our fearful hearts, God says, “Since you cannot trust yourselves, trust me.” We respond, “Why should we trust you?” God says, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” “I am the one who delivers out of sin, death, and the devil.” “I am the resurrection and the life.” This is who God really is. This is a God you could truly fear, love, and trust above all others.

Katie, Shawna, and Michael – for the rest of your lives, there will be a struggle between the two you’s. Remember that you cannot kill the old Adam yourselves. Only God can kill the old Adam. God does this through his Word: the law and the gospel. Read the Word, hear the sermon, and receive the sacrament!

A letter from Linda

I want to end by sharing a letter that highlights the importance of God’s Word. This letter is from a woman in the congregation who can no longer attend because she is unable to hear. However, the Word is so important to her that every Sunday she reads the sermon.

Good Morning Russ,

Sam has just given me your sermon and it gave me a warm and fuzzy feeling to read that you mentioned my confirmation verse in the sermon. I was confirmed on June 16, 1929, and my confirmation verse read, “Be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” That verse has given me a lot of comfort through many of my 90 years.

Take care and God bless,
Linda

Reformation, there is comfort in God’s Word. In it is your life, forgiveness, and future.

In Jesus’ Name, Amen