

## My Hero's Journey

### 2 Corinthians 13:11-14 (EHV)

<sup>11</sup> Finally, brothers, rejoice. Set things in order. Be encouraged. Agree with one another. Be at peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. <sup>12</sup> Greet one another with a holy kiss. <sup>13</sup> All the saints greet you. <sup>14</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

We have three young people who have been on a journey, a journey that has included 2 years of Catechism classes and memory work and sermon reports and tests and acolyting. Today, they're getting confirmed. It's like they've conquered Catechism. So, it's fitting to ask where they are in their story. Is this the beginning, the middle, or the end? In fact, where are any of us on our Christian journey? And are we the heroes of our story?

In 1949, Joseph Campbell, a professor of literature, published the basic storyline pattern for many adventure tales, appropriately called, "The Hero's Journey." Now, you can get into a lot of details with this, but the hero's journey breaks down into 3 overall stages. First, there is the departure, the call of the protagonist to embark on an adventure into the unknown. Often, the hero is reluctant or even refuses to go, but then a mentor encourages, guides, teaches, and helps the hero take up the call. Think Obi-Wan telling Luke Skywalker that he must go with him to Alderaan and learn the ways of the Force.

The second stage is called the initiation, which is all the trials that the hero undergoes on the adventure. The hero may fail at some of these trials but learns from those failures, gets stronger, and moves on to take on the main obstacle or enemy... like Luke escaping the Death Star and then returning to destroy it using his X-wing and the Force.

The third stage is the return. The climax is over. The hero has overcome the final challenge, defeated the big baddy, and now has to move forward, start a new life with their newfound powers or treasures to benefit others. That's Luke finding his new home with the Rebellion, fighting for their cause, now his cause, with his skills and Force powers.

Bree, Nick, & Sierra, what's your hero's journey? You might be thinking that your departure, your call into some unknown adventure, happened when your Mom and Dad told you that you were going to attend something called Catechism class on Wednesday nights with Pastor Klein. Your initiation would then be each class you attended, each piece of memory work you memorized, each test you took, each time you acolyted. If so, today is the climax, the last trial, and then you get to return home with your newfound confirmation status having received the true body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper. Though these are all pieces of your Christian journey, today is not your triumphant return of your hero's journey, the end.

Your journey, like all of us here today, began with a call, but not an email saying that you were going to be taking Catechism class. Your call to embark on your hero's journey came the day God called you. The world was black and bleak. You were born into this world spiritually dead on arrival, born from sinful parents, wicked and rotten to the core. Some may have said that you just don't know any better, not evil but uninformed. Others would have called you the villain - unable to do anything right, unable anything to make yourself look good before God or endear yourself to him. But you were brought to church. You were taught God's Word. You were baptized. You were changed. You went from the darkness of sin to light of life in God. Your trials, your initiation, began. You now fought the forces of evil. You used the sword of the Spirit, God's Word, to fight back Satan and his fellow demons. You said "no" to drinking the poison of this world that says God doesn't matter, that you can make it on your own without him, that you don't need all this extra work and stress that comes with Catechism class.

Today is not the start of your return of your hero's journey, that you have new powers, new knowledge of God and his Word and you're done. Today is the start of another trial of your initiation phase. It's the same trials that Christians underwent some 2,000 years ago, that all of us here are still fighting every day: "Set things in order. Be encouraged. Agree with one another. Be at peace." (verse 11) Like a knight taking up an oath to fight for king and country, today you are pledging your sword, your life, in service to God to do these same things. If anything, you are more at the beginning of your hero's journey than the end. You are being called to a life of peace where you forgive others as God has forgiven you, releasing any anger or grudges that you want to hold on to. The task before you is set things in order by loving love God above all others and loving your neighbor as Christ loved you. Your loyalty and devotion to God will be tested with thoughts of selfishness and laziness, that your duty to God was finished on your confirmation day and there's nothing more required of you to live happily ever after.

Here are your trials: Will you continue steadfast in God and his teachings that you would rather die than live in any way counter to him? Will you spend all the days of your life faithfully conforming your life to God's standard and his teachings, being faithful in the use of his Word and his sacraments, and so remain true to God? Today, your journey is continuing, as it is for all of ours. For us who are confirmed, it's a time to reflect on how our journey is going. Are we overcoming our trials, fighting temptation, vanquishing the devil? Are we keeping our confirmation vows, staying pure to God's Word? Will we tomorrow and the next day? How will all our stories end?

If your hero's journey is all about you, you will fail your initiation – not just confirmation trials but your whole Christian journey. You will not overcome your trials because you will take the selfish, lazy, easier path of no resistance in order to please yourself. You won't set things in order and agree with others, but you will hold on to anger and grudges and blow off God until they agree with you. You won't remain faithful or try conforming your life to God's Word but will live by your own rules. If you go it alone with your power and wits, your hero's journey will end in tragedy. You will lay down and die to your spiritual enemies.

The true hero of all our journeys is not us but someone else. God is our Hero. It is he who was called to arms, to leave the comfort of heaven, to undergo the trials of temptations of every kind – just like we experience, but without sin. Satan tried to pull him to be at odds with God's Word, but Christ faithfully conformed his life to it and was steadfast to it every single day, upheld it, kept it perfectly. Satan tried to pull him into laziness and selfishness, but Christ overcame by also seeking to serve others instead of himself. He took on our sins on himself for us. He sacrificed his life into death on a cross to remove our sins, all our failures in our trials of life – everything from failure to memorize Bible passages to the days we didn't want to study God's Word or go to church to the selfishness of caring for ourselves instead of others. And then he rose again from the dead showing that he had indeed conquered the devil, all our sin, and even death itself. By doing so, God has made peace between us and him, between us and all believers. We are forgiven by his life, his accomplishments, his completed journey. This is God's love for us.

The real hero of our faith journey is God, the ultimate hero whose journey is summarized in the words of the Apostles' Creed – all the things God did and does for us. His journey makes all of our faith journeys lead to the same happy ending.

Today, Bree, Nick, Sierra, and all of us, our Christian journeys continue. That means more trials, more temptations, are coming. Our journey doesn't end until the last enemy is destroyed: death. This last enemy is defeated by the journey of our Hero - God's journey for us.

You are not on this journey alone. Your Hero and mine, God, goes with you and me. You are assured of that every time you hear the blessing: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (verse 14) We have the triune God not just as a wise mentor figure to help us with the trials, but as the Hero who took on and overcame all the trials for us.

What's more is that you have the people here with you and all the ones who have come before us. "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you." (verses 12-13) You may not be giving anyone a holy kiss today, but the fellowship is real – even better than the Fellowship of the Ring. These people, they are here with you. And there are so many more that you can't see right now from the people worshiping online to the fellowship we have with all believers in Christ, the Holy Christian Church, that communion of saints. It's a communion you share, even more so as you eat and drink Jesus' true body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine in his Supper. It is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins just as it is for all of us. It is our expression of unity. It is encouragement for all of us to keep fighting this fight of faith, walking our Christian journey together as we walk with our Hero on our faith journey to heaven, our ultimate new home.

So, today, we rejoice. We rejoice not because our confirmands have reached the end of their hero's journey by being confirmed, but that they continue their Christian journey with us and with our one and only true Hero: our Triune God. With our Hero journeying along with us, we know that we are at peace with him because he set things right between us and him and we are encouraged to continue our journeys heavenward with our fellowship, our communion of saints, brought together by God's call, by his perfect life, his suffering and death. We all go forward with our Hero, on to ultimate victory at the end of our faith journey. Amen.