Ephesians 4:32: Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another just as God in Christ has forgiven us.

 James 1:22: Be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it. Such people are deceiving themselves.

 It is such an interesting time. We clearly are living at a time when there are lots and lots of interesting, some would say, stressful things going on. We still have the remnants of a pandemic causing all sorts of difficulties and problems. Right now, we have stress because of inflation and the high prices we are dealing with. Just for the record, a shortage of baby formula? Who would have ever thought? And the last time I looked gas was at $4.59 a gallon! That is the highest gas has ever been and we are told that it is going to go higher. Makes you kind of wonder if when Addison and Andrew are our age if they will look back at this time and they will say, “Hey, I remember a time when gasoline was only $4.59!” I will tell you that I suspect that by the time they reach our ages, there is a good chance that gasoline and what it was will only be a distant memory for them. Such is the way life changes.

 It is possible that by the time they are our ages that our Country as we know it will no longer exist. I don’t know what will be in its place, but it is clear that things are changing out there. Maybe will we just be one planet with a global style of government, such as is depicted in the Star Trek series of shows. Honestly, I don’t know, I just know that as time goes on things tend to change. I speak from experience. What the world was when I was 14 and what it is today are different. Some similarities, but different. Some of the differences are pretty awesome, like the fact that we can carry our phones around in our pockets rather than having them attached to a wall! Often homes only had one phone, attached to the wall. Or the internet. What an awesome thing this has been. Instant, at your fingertips knowledge and information on any subject. The drawback is that you have to spend considerable time just trying to figure out if the information you have before you is accurate and true!

 One thing that is not going to change is the need for our Savior and what he has done. It is clear that our world does indeed have a problem. It is the problem of sin! Because of sin the world is, as God’s Word says, **“inclined to evil.”** That means that no matter how sophisticated we get, humans will always find a way to hurt and harm, to chase after evil and selfishness, and in the end be the cause of sorrow and despair. This truth is right in front of us. For instance, the internet as wonderful as it is, has become the greatest vehicle of pornography, identity theft and scams such as this world has never seen. And don’t get me started on computer viruses, things created only because they can destroy what others have put together. In the pursuit of good and equality we are undermining law and order and crime, so that crime is growing by leaps and bounds. Right now, people are fleeing our bigger cities just to be safe. Such is the world we live in.

 Why do I bring all of this up? Well, because as time goes on and as things change I want to encourage the two confirmands before us and even we ourselves, never forget the truth, the marvel and the wonder of our God and Lord and His Son Jesus Christ. If you would, the theme for our sermon today will be: STAY FAITHFUL TO JESUS.

 Now I am not trying to be negative, what I am trying to do is be realistic and true to what God’s Word says. We do live in a world tainted, damaged by sin. Sin will no longer be a problem once Jesus returns again, but in the meantime until he does return things will get interesting. For instance, consider the words of Jesus as he is telling us what we can expect as the time gets closer for his returning. In Matthew 24 he says, **“Watch out that no one deceives you…You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, because all these things must happen; but that is not yet the end. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. But all these are only the beginning of birth pains. Then they will hand you over to be persecuted, and they will put you to death. You will be hated by all nations because of my name…Because lawlessness will increase, the love of many will grow cold. But whoever endures to the end will be saved.”**

In truth, there are a number of sections of God’s Word that speak in this way. It is not a reason to panic or to be afraid, but rather a reason to sit back and recognize that God knows what is going on and that in truth it will all happen in accord with the gracious plans of God. So we don’t panic, rather we sit back and trust in God. He told us it would be this way, and He is right! So what I will do is trust in Him all the more for He is the one who will, in accord with His plans and purpose, bring it all to the good. In other words, though we may not know how, everything that happens will serve the gracious and loving purpose of God for the sake of his believers. What we will do is stay faithful and true.

 Faithful and true because we have Jesus. Now contrary to what people think Jesus is about, the fact of the matter is that Jesus is our Lord and Savior from sin. Jesus didn’t come to tell us that the present would be rosy and wonderful and we would never have any problems. Jesus came because of the problem of sin, sin that separates us from God and renders our eternal future rather doubtful. What Jesus did was come into our world, lived the perfect life we could not and then in the most perfect act of love, went to the cross where Jesus agreed to take away the wrath and anger of God the Father for all the sins of all the world. Make no mistake, Jesus took upon himself the punishment, the total punishment of sin for all the world. Yes, for you and for me. And then Jesus simply tells us that when we trust in Him and his grace, we will be blessed with the gift, the eternal gift of forgiveness and life, eternal life with Him in His heavenly kingdom. That’s what Jesus is all about. About forgiveness and eternal life.

 I believe what Jesus has done has an impact on us. Listen to the passage that Addison choose for herself on this confirmation day and you will hear and grasp this impact. She chose Ephesians 4:32 which says, **”Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another just as God in Christ has forgiven us.”**

 This young lady, moved and impacted by the message of her Savior Jesus shows, by her choice of passage, exactly what being a Christian is. She has chosen a passage that speaks of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. She is telling us that she wants to be kind and compassionate, yes, forgiving to those who are around her. Why? Because she wants to earn heaven? No, as the passage says, because of what her Savior Jesus has done for her. Jesus has shown her kindness and compassion. Jesus has shown and given her complete and total forgiveness. It is this action, this giving from Jesus, this love and grace from Jesus that motivates her to want to live her life to his honor and praise.

 Now, will she be perfect at this? No way! I can tell you as a man who has spent considerable time with these two that the biggest challenge to the kindness, compassion and forgiveness of Addison is Andrew! Don’t get me wrong, they both love each other but there is no doubt that Andrew clearly and joyfully likes to challenge his sister’s kindness, compassion and forgiveness. They will get better at it as they both follow and keep their hearts in Jesus. That’s the awesome part of this faith of ours. We can falter and fail. We can be the exact opposite of what Jesus encourages us in at times and yet, just because we are sorry, just because we want to do what is right and don’t, just because we look to and turn to Jesus he will and does forgive us. And with that forgiveness He once again encourages us, gently commands us to practice being Him: to be kind, and compassionate and forgiving to those around us. And you know what is neat? I can tell you that I truly and sincerely believe that this passage really is found in the heart of Addison. She desires, she wants to be, she works at being these very things in Jesus! Addison, don’t stop doing that! But don’t ever forget the reason! What Jesus has done for you!

 And I want you to know that Andrew has really done the very same thing. His passage is James 1:22. It says, **“Be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it. Such people are deceiving themselves.”**

 If you would, let me give you a personal translation of this passage because in the translation before us the simplicity and awe of the Greek text is missing. A straight forward translation would say, **“Be a doer of the word and not only a hearer, deceiving yourself!”** Now, there is nothing wrong with the translation before us because of the context but my translation gives you the very simple and powerful command before us. Yes, it is a command. You might argue that it is a gentle command or perhaps even and evangelical encouragement, but make no mistake, there is a command here.

 Our Lord commands us to do, to act out, to live according to, to follow and to obey His Word. The term, “word” can clearly be understood to be the entire Bible, that Word of God given and having as its very foundation the power and majesty of Jesus, the Living Word. In other words the passage encourages, follow Jesus. Since Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world, wouldn’t following Him be the greatest and wisest thing to do? To hear the word and ignore it is to me like continuing to drive with a flat tire. You can feel the tire is flat. You know that to keep going is going to cause damage and problems. But you keep going, driving fast and furious so that eventually that tire is completely torn away, and then the next ones too. Eventually the rims are ground down to nothing and now even the bottom of the car is being torn apart. No good will come of this! (I know, all of you are thinking that no one would be so foolish. I would encourage you to watch a few cop shows with car chases and you will see it happens a lot more than you could imagine.) So, Jesus encourages us to hear him and to follow Him.

 Now at this point I want to tell you that I am just going to spend the next few moments telling you what the Word tells us. It tells us about sin. It tells us of God’s plan to fix the problem, the eternal problem of sin. It tells us how God, promised, revealed, and worked in history to bring about the Savior. And yep, the word tells us of Jesus! Jesus who came to live the perfect life we could not and then in accord with His Father went to the cross the pay the price of sin for all of us. Yep, our verse takes us right back to Jesus, the resurrection and the gift of forgiveness and eternal life. That’s what Jesus came to do. He came to make sure that no matter what is going on in this world, you and I have a future, an eternal future just because He has won the victory and grants His life to us.

 In other words, Andrew’s choice of passage says the very same thing as Addison’s. And yes, Andrew’s greatest challenge in keeping Jesus words in his heart is….Andrew! I have been telling Andrew for quite some time now that he is his own worst enemy. But in truth, Andrew, like Addison, has in his heart the wonder, the marvel and the joy of his Savior. I believe that Andrew is absolutely sincere in his desire to hear and do in his life the things of Jesus. And like all of us, he will falter and fail here and there. The prayer we have is that Andrew will continue to turn to Jesus and his example of grace, love and compassion and let that be his strength all the more. That’s what faith is all about.

 Now, just in case you might have missed it, these words actually pertain to all of us. We all have the problem of sin. We all face the trials and temptations, the difficulties and brick walls of this life. But take to heart the graciousness of Jesus. He has brought us redemption. He has showered his grace and love upon us. He has loved us and in his love He then gives us some tremendous promises. He will always be with us. He will never give us more than we can handle. He will always make everything serve for our eternal good and salvation. In other words, with Jesus on our side, what is there to fear, what is there to worry about, what is there in this world that can bring us down?

 So, on this day of confirmation, Addison, Andrew, all of us, let’s take to heart the wonderful passages before us. Passages of encouragement. Passages that really tell us there is nothing to fret. Passages that say, “Stay in Jesus.” That is the best way, now and always. Amen.