

Whenever I visit St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Saginaw, MI, I head down in the basement, and look for my confirmation class. As I scan the 1970 confirmation class, I see my mug shot and the mug shots my old classmates. I still remember the examination night before confirmation, when Pastor Gensmer grilled us on the catechism. I tried to hide that night at the front of church from answering any questions. But Rev. Gensmer nailed me on one question. He asked me why we baptize babies when the Bible doesn't say specifically that we should baptize babies. I told him that the Bible says, we should baptize all nations, and that families were baptized. Whew. I knew the answer, so my mom was not asked the question to help me out. Back then too, I had the mentality about confirmation that it was money making venture for me.. All those cards with big bucks in them. Man, what am I going to buy with all that cash? I didn't really read the cards, just ripped them open, acted like I was reading the words of the card, and grabbed out that \$5.00 or \$10.00 bill. Further, I viewed confirmation as a time to take a break from studying the Bible. All that memory work, and homework was over. Now I had high school, a paper route and friends to be focused in on. I think many of my confirmation class had the same idea. Unfortunately, many of them have disappeared from worship to this very day. In fact, over 50% of my classmates are no longer active in any Christian church. What happened? Today, is a day when 12 young people are sitting where I sat 40 years ago. I look out at the 12 and say, "I want to just lock you all up for 30 years in this church, so you won't fall away. Come back quickly Jesus so we don't lose one of them. But obviously, I can't do anything like that. You have to be in the world. But what I can do is pray for you. In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus prays that all believers be with him where He is and see his glory in heaven. So that is my prayer as well, Lord, "Keep them with You always!"

I just saw some Prom pictures of a young man from this congregation and his date on Facebook. The teen is a friend of mine and gives me advice on the Detroit Lions. He had on a tux, and the girl a very nice dress. It looked to me on Facebook like they had a great time. Now if you know Prom is coming, you need to be ready. Boy needs to buy a corsage for the girl. Girl needs to buy a boutonniere. The outfits need to match. If it's a date the boy has to pay for dinner. You don't want to go to Prom in a pair of stinky jeans or an old dress. Jesus tells us today, something better is coming than your High School Prom. It is the end of the world when Jesus comes back with the sound of a trumpet. And Jesus wants everyone to be excited, ready, and well dressed for the occasion. In Fact, Jesus is bringing some great stuff along with him. "My reward is with me." He, Jesus is not bringing a corsage that wilts, or a prom dress that won't fit you in 10 years. He is bringing the rewards of the tree of life, a crown for you to wear, he will give you a new name, your name will be in his book of life, and he will give you the right to sit with him on a throne. Be ready. Keep drinking the energy drink that gives you eternal energy, His Word. IT alone keeps you strong and prepared. Don't have the Invincible spirit, that you don't need to stay closely connected to Jesus. The devil wants you to think, that you can just seize the day, have fun, party, and your spiritual life will remain just fine. I call the devil's tactic the Boiling frog syndrome. If you put the frog in a luke-warm pan of water, the frog will just sit there as the water gets hotter and hotter. Eventually, the water will become so hot that the frog

will pass out, and die. The frog was unaware of the danger until it was too late. On the otherhand, if you would throw a frog into boiling water, the frog would jump out immediately.

This is the way the devil works on young people. The Slow burn. The devil comes at you and says, "Your parents dragged you to church every week, but now you are more on your own, you can still be a Christian and not go to church every week". So you start coming to church now and then. "Great says, the devil, get them spiritually weaker by not hearing the Word of God". Next, the devil tries to visually weaken your morals. He preaches his sermons to you on MTV, most movies and TV shows. The sermons themes given to you visually are: have sex before marriage, have a mouth that sounds like it came from the gutter, seize the day, Your happiness is all that matters!" What you see with your eyes, can't hurt you! You are a Christian, you'll be alright". So what happens, as time goes on you begin to justify that certain things are really ok with God. They can't hurt you. Slow burn three is: Experimentation with drugs and sex. The devil comes and says to you, "Come on, you should be able to drink some alcohol or smoke a joint. You have to see what its like. You can't say its wrong unless you try it. And you don't want your friends to think you are strange by refusing." You'll be fine, you are a Christian!"

Before you know it, you are finding yourself regularly having to have a smoke or a drink to unwind or relax at parties. And for many of you this use of drugs leads to addiction. Gradually destroying your faith! Slow burn four: Satan says, "You need friends. Who cares if they are not Christians? They can't hurt you. You will be alright!. Those Christian kids are dorky anyway, so make friends with unbelievers. Young people if you hang around someone who doesn't go to church, believes that if you love someone even though you are not married, you have sex with them, you will eventually adopt those morals for your own life, and lose your connection with Jesus Christ. Be very careful who you choose for friends. Ask yourself questions like, are these friends helping me to draw closer to Jesus or are they pulling me away from him? Am I influencing them toward Jesus, or are they influencing me away from Him. The writer Paul says, be careful, in tears he says, "Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny in destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame." Young people, stay alert, beware of the slow burn! Don't have the invincible complex. The Bible says, "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." "Continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

One item that always impresses me about Prom nights is how clean and sharp everyone looks. Those outfits are spotlessly clean. You don't wash or clean those Prom outfits yourself. Someone else does the dry cleaning, or washing. Jesus makes it clear today that everyone here today has soiled clothing. The Bible says, "You are all as an unclean thing, and all your righteous acts are like filthy rags." No one will be admitted to the Heavenly Prom, without the Ultimate clean tux and dress supplied to you by Jesus. You teenagers may look youthful, not a wrinkle on your body, you may be in top physical shape, but before God, you smell and stink. Young people, you need to remember how much we need the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. You see, when you came to catechism class, some of you talked out of turn, you didn't do your

assignments always on time, I had to hound some of you for your homework. Some of you were doing math during catechism, some of you didn't take notes when I told you too, some of you just did a lot of daydreaming. You sinned. Think of those harsh feelings you had toward some of your classmates during the year. Think of the times you sassed off your parents. As far as God is concerned, you should be punished. You should be damned. For the wages of your sin is death. Even what you might think as insignificant in a classroom setting is very significant to God. But what does God do, does he whack you with the eternal burn of hell. No, He gives you what you don't deserve. He sends his Son Jesus into the world. Jesus does the best clean up job on our dirty laundry. Jesus makes us squeaky clean before our heavenly Father. By his stripes on that cross, we have been healed or washed clean. His white Prom Tux or Dress becomes ours. Our reading says, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city." You and I have the ability to go right through the gates into heaven oneday. We won't be rejected at the gate. Plus, we will have access to the tree of life in heaven. That means, we will never have to face death again. We will live forever. All because of Jesus. The Bible says, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you, through his poverty might be rich." Jesus had it made. The richest person in the universe. He had the angels singing praises to him. And yet He saw us in trouble, so he comes down to this world as a pauper, lives and dies for our sins, so that we might be rich. Rich in forgiveness, rich in hope, rich in oneday having eternal life. Always remember the wonderful grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without Jesus, our life would be a dead end, not a slow burn but an eternal burn.

Some people believe that teenagers don't have much influence in the church. That's not true. You young people can have a positive effect. Your friends look to you to see what is important and what really matters in life. Is what matters in life just the prom, the football or basketball game, the NFL draft? Or is there something more important to you that you really gives you a more happy and fulfilling life? By going to church every week, by participating in youth activities, by looking for places to serve, just to serve, not just to get volunteer hours to graduate, you can lead your friends to this church where they can get to know Jesus. Our lesson says the Holy Spirit is ready to team up with us in this mission. Vs. 17 says, "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" ; Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." We have friends who are thirsty, needing to know what life is really all about. We can be the glass that brings that living water to them. So be different than most teens. Come to church weekly. Set the example. By being in church, the Word will also change who you are. You will tend to become less self-centered. How? Well when you hear about everything Jesus has done for you in the Word, you just naturally want to do things for others. Someone once said, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" In the years ahead, there should be no doubt in anyone's mind that you are a Christian. May all of you be Christian convicts, convicted to Jesus. May God keep you in his care always. May not one of you be lost. Amen.