

Pastor Jon's Sermon on Sunday, May 21. "Confirmation Isn't Graduation from Church"

To our confirmands and parents, I first want to say thank you. Thank you for showing up for confirmation these past three years. I know it is hard with family schedules these days. But you showed up. It was a witness to Patty and me every time you walked through those doors. And your class didn't have it easy. You had to deal with 3 staffing changes at Our Savior's and a pandemic to boot. But you are here today.

So congratulations as you affirm your baptism today.

It is like in the Fancy Nancy book series we are reading to our little one. Confirmation is fancy for saying "yes" to your baptism, whether that happened when you were a baby or when you were older. Saying "yes" matters. Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, "Let your yes be yes and your no be no." In other words, let your word be your bond. Your "Yes" today is a "Yes" to grow in your faith.

I like comparing confirmation to getting your driver's license. When you get your driver's license you begin to drive on your own. You more than likely will take driver's ed and behind the wheel... Confirmation instruction. You drove with your parents or responsible adult. You practiced your faith in daily life, at school, on the field, on stage, or on the court. And once you pass your driver's test, you get your license.

That's where the simile breaks down. There is no exam for confirmation or final test. It is a simply a "yes" to the promises made to you in your baptism of forgiveness, protection from death and the devil, and eternal life. And like with cars, you will make mistakes and get in fender benders. But with your faith, there is always grace and forgiveness.

And just a reminder, confirmation is not graduation from church... but the beginning of a lifelong journey to follow Jesus. This community of faith needs your gifts and participation to be whole.

When I got confirmed long ago, I must admit I don't remember much from the classes. We were given several packets of material to work through every Wednesday. If you fell behind, we weren't supposed to, but we copied our neighbors. They were fill in the blank questions that you that you had to look in the Bible for the answers. Other than opening the Bible and finding where things were, I didn't retain much. We also had to memorize the small catechism and recite it to a lay catechist. But later in life, I realized that confirmation wasn't about what I learned, but the relationships formed with my friends, pastors, and caring adults in the church.

It wasn't till after seminary that I could finally articulate my faith in Jesus Christ. I couldn't tell you what a Lutheran Christian believed when I was your age. Now I know that it means. That we are justified by grace through faith on account of Christ alone. That's fancy for being put in a right relationship with God... through God's grace. In other words, I can't make myself right with God based on how good I am or how religious I am. It is simply God's action upon me and the world in Jesus Christ on the cross and in his resurrection that makes me right with God. And believing that is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Today we will pray for that Holy Spirit to stir up your faith to believe.

Saying yes to your baptism means you are saying Yes to Jesus' unconditional love for you and his teaching to love one another as he first loved us. Which is an amazing type of love. Being saved by Grace through faith is fancy for accepting God's undeserved love for you in Jesus Christ.

If you haven't figured it out, today marks a new beginning for you. It is a day you publicly affirm your faith in Jesus Christ in front of your parents and all who are gathered. And know that you will continue to grow into this faith the rest of your life. But be aware, you will have times when you will wander off to find where demons dwell. Like the line in the hymn *Borning Cry* says. But because you are baptized, nothing you do, or that the world does to you, can ever separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus according to Romans 8:31-39.

Finally, our lessons for today. Our first lesson from Jeremiah 29 reminds us that surely God has plans for you... plans for you to prosper, not for your harm, to have a future with hope. Even in times of wilderness or wandering, or when your future is unknown, God wants you to seek God out. To pray. Here God promises to hear you and let you find God, and restore you.

In our Gospel, Jesus prays for his followers to know him and to get along. Knowing Jesus means you have a relationship with him. I feel we got to know each other when we ate together, or played in the gym together, or worshipped together. So spend time getting to know Jesus in his word and sacrament. Meet him in the face of your neighbors. Jesus says, when you know me, you will have eternal life. Eternal life in John's Gospel means that you and everyone else will have enough and be enough. John calls this abundant life. When you fail, for example, or when you are anxious, or when you question your self-worth, knowing Jesus will remind you that you are enough. You are loved and accepted by God right now.

So as you affirm your baptism today, know that this community is here for you. It is a great place to share your gifts and serve. If you are musical, talk to Jim and he will find a place for you to share your gifts. If you want to help in worship, sign up to read or serve communion, or join the church council. Being confirmed means you are now a card-carrying adult in the church. If you get a job, I challenge you to start giving to the church. Come and hang out next year after confirmation with Patty as we form a youth group. Sign up for the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans.

Can I get an Amen! Amen!