

Pentecost Sunday (and Confirmation Sunday)
May 27, 2007

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Scriptures: Acts 2:1-21, Romans 8:14-17, John 14:8-19

Today I would like to speak directly with the young people who are going to be confirmed today, and I'll let the rest of you "listen in." You might keep in mind as you do that you probably made similar vows at some point along the line. And, last I checked, living out one's baptism does not have any expiration dates on it. It's not something you ever retire from. The call to faithful following extended to these young people today is the same call extended to each of us every day.

Doug, Lucero, Estrella, Sonia, today you are going to be confirmed, that is to say, you are going to make an affirmation of your baptism. I am guessing that you were all baptized as infants or small children, which means there was a day when you were held in someone's arms as they stood before this, or a similar, baptismal font. No doubt your parents were there, some padrinos, maybe some grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins. They were looking on as water was poured over you and you were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. You were claimed as child of God, a member of the Body of Christ.

Maybe you cried, maybe you didn't. But for sure, someone was there to promise to raise you in the faith, to bring you to God's house, to provide for your Christian education, such that you would arrive at this day, the day of your confirmation, when you would confirm the promises made on your behalf on the day of your baptism, This is the day in which you claim the Christian faith as your own, when you make following Jesus, all that he is and stands for, your life's commitment.

The degree to which a young person comprehends all that on their Confirmation Day varies. It is very easy for youth to come to this day and make their confirmation simply because that is what their parents expect them to do. This is the event that comes at the end of two years of attending Confirmation classes. It is a day for getting dressed up in nice clothes and having pictures taken, cake and punch, cards and congratulations. It might feel a little like a "graduation" from Sunday School.

That is such a problem in the Lutheran church that there are jokes about it, the one that comes to mind has to do with various denominations pastors trying to figure out how to get rid of the squirrels that are inhabiting each of their church's attics. The Lutheran pastor is the only one who is successful in getting rid of them. He just held a Confirmation for them all and they were never seen in church again. It would be funnier if there wasn't such a large element of truth to it.

My hope, my prayer, is that you know differently. My hope and prayer is that you know that this day of Confirmation is not an ending as much as it is a beginning. This is the beginning of your own life of faith, the day you confirm, affirm, the faith in which you were baptized. You begin by renouncing all the forces of evil, the devil and all his empty promises. What you are saying there is that you reject all the things that go against God

and God's will. You reject the things that would keep you from being or becoming the person God created you to be.

Put in other terms you might think of it as renouncing peer pressure, temptations to harmful behavior. Being a follower of Jesus is supposed to make a difference in how you live your life. We usually talk about how that means a difference in how you treat other people. But for young people especially, we should be clear that it also means in how you care for your body, mind, and spirit. God has given you the gift of life, talents, abilities. Don't waste them, or mistreat them.

Next you will say together with the congregation the Apostle's Creed, this short statement of belief, in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. This creed is not so much about what we think. Believing, in the biblical sense was never about a list of ideas or statements, an act of the mind. Believing is about what we trust. It is a matter of the heart. We trust in God as provider. We trust in God as Savior, we trust in God as companion and helper. Don't worry if that isn't all straight in your head. Getting your heart and mind around that is likely to take a lifetime.

And then, we get to the promises you make. There are five things that are part of "continuing to live in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism." First there is "to live among God's faithful people" and second, "to hear God's word and share in the Lord's supper." Third: "to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed." Fourth, "to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus." And fifth, "to strive for justice and peace in all the earth." To which you respond, "I do, and I ask God to help and guide me."

The first two are all about being part of Christian community. Being a Christian automatically includes being with other Christians, to care for each other and to work together for a greater good. The first two items are the things that nourish us, strengthen us. For the sake of 3, 4, and 5. These are the ones that show up when we live out our faith outside of church. Proclaiming Christ, in word and deed, serving others, and striving for justice and peace in all the earth. That is what it means to live out your baptism, to be a faithful follower of Jesus. Exactly how you will do that will depend on you and God. The day will come, when you will realize that God is giving you an opportunity to serve someone, or to tell them that they are loved and forgiven, or to strive for justice and peace. And, even though you may not feel qualified, or confident, you need to remember that God also has given you the Holy Spirit, to empower you, guide you, to sustain you. The lesson from Romans 8 says, "you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear." You did not receive a Spirit of timid-ness, but of boldness. You did not receive a spirit of weakness, but of power. (The Greek is closer to the Spanish, "poder" to be able to...)

When I was looking through the Pentecost hymns for today, I was struck by some of the titles about the Holy Spirit. There was "Loving Spirit" followed by "Spirit of Gentleness" followed by "Murmur of the Dove's Wing" All these gentle, meek-sounding songs. They are not too surprising because we like to think of God as loving and gentle and murmuring. But then there was the hymn I selected for today, "God of Tempest, God of Whirlwind." God also is that. The Spirit came into Jerusalem as the rush of a mighty wind, and it changed everything. Sometimes being a follower of Jesus is going to take

that same type of forcefulness, that same kind of boldness. Sometimes loving someone, or serving someone, or striving for peace and justice, will require boldness, risk-taking. It might be the unpopular, or counter-cultural, thing to do. Sometimes people won't like it if you are being a faithful follower of Jesus. Follow Jesus anyway. Trust the Spirit to be there for you too.

Living out your baptism, truly being a follower of Jesus, is not for wimps. To follow Jesus is to move toward the cross. It is to move toward the suffering and pain of the world. It is to work for healing and wholeness of all. Following Jesus will give you different priorities than the world has. Your neighbor's wellbeing matters. The poor matter, the lost matter. There are no good people or bad people, there are only people who are also God's beloved children. Your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Living out your baptism also means living out that relationship: you are God's beloved child. Nothing you do, or don't do, can change God's love for you. No matter what happens, God loves you. No matter what you did, when you repent, God forgives you. And God calls you again to follow Jesus. That's the journey that begins today. May God bless your life's journey of faithful following, of living out your baptism. May your journey be filled with all joy. In the midst of whatever tempest or whirlwind comes your way, may you know that peace the world can not give, may you be blest in every possible way as you live out your baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. Amen.