

June 5, 2022 – Acts 2:1-21 and John 14:8-17 – Pentecost/Confirmation Sunday

Today we celebrate with our confirmands as they affirm their baptism and say “Yes” to continuing their participation in the Christian faith and being followers of Jesus. In doing so they become part of millions of people throughout the world and throughout the centuries who have taken this step in their faith journey.

Our scripture reading for this worship service is from The Acts of the Apostles when the Holy Spirit made its presence known to the disciples of Jesus “like the rush of a violent wind” and “divided tongues as of fire.” Whether this is a literal appearance or an experience that seemed like this to those people who felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives we cannot know for sure, but that really doesn’t matter. What does matter is that this Spirit of God changed them in a way that turned their fear into love and their doubt into faith.

This is what we hope for whenever someone affirms their faith in Christ – that they may leave whatever it is they fear behind and that they may gain a confidence and faith in the possibilities of goodness and love always being present in their lives. I’m not sure we appreciate how wonderful it is to go through life seeing the good in people and situations instead of the bad. I’m not sure we understand how life enhancing it is to face any situation with love instead of letting fear take over. But that’s a part of what we hope for when someone decides to affirm their faith in Jesus and that’s what we hope for our confirmands today.

All we have to do is read the newspaper or listen to a newscast to become aware of how many things are going on in our world that are causing harm to people and to the world. It doesn’t take much effort to be weighed down by negativity and despair. It doesn’t take a whole lot of work to see what’s going wrong. But we don’t have to go down that path. Instead we can make the effort to be lifted up by positivity. We can do the work necessary to see what’s going right.

That’s what we are called to do through our baptism and our affirmation of faith. We are called to be beacons of light in the world and messengers of good news. We are called to go forth and spread joy and hope with both our actions and our words. We

are called to promote peace and goodwill among all people. That's not always easy but it is always worthwhile.

As young people, you confirmands will face situations different than children or adults might, but that doesn't make them any less important or real. No matter what age we might be there will always be situations that cause us to worry and feel anxious. There will always be people who are not easy to get along with or who do us harm. In Ukraine at the present time, adults, children and teenagers are afraid of what is happening to their country and what that means for their own personal lives. Millions of them have fled to other countries, including here in Canada, hoping to escape with their lives. Some of those people may have moved into your neighbourhood. Some of those teenagers may now be attending your school or will be soon. How will you welcome them if they do show up in your neighbourhood or school? Will you show them around and become their friends? Will you help them adjust to a new country, a new home, and a new school? In other words, will you live out your faith as a follower of Jesus?

I certainly hope so.

What you are doing today in affirming your Christian faith is not simply a few words spoken in church and an act that leads to your graduation but a promise before God to do the best you can to live up to the teachings of Jesus and his instructions to love one another as he loves you. Like all of us who have participated in confirmation in our own teenage years, you will not always do that even though you may try to do so to the best of your ability. When that happens, please know that God's grace always prevails. That is at the heart of our Christian faith and certainly within our Lutheran denomination of Christianity.

It has been a joy to have you participate in our confirmation sessions this year. Your willingness to enter into conversation and discussion with me has been such a pleasure. Your commitment to doing the homework and thinking about how what you learned connects with your own faith journey now and in the future was admirable. I have no hesitancy in recommending you for confirmation and am glad you decided to do so.

Your family is here today to celebrate with you as you affirm your faith in the same faith they are part of. Some of them will join me in laying hands upon you in a few minutes during the affirmation of faith part of the worship service. This laying on of hands is part of our belief that God's Holy Spirit works in mysterious and invisible ways that we do not fully understand, and that's okay. We don't have to understand to believe. We don't have to hear the Spirit like the rush of a violent wind or see it descending upon you like tongues of fire to believe that it is real and present. The Holy Spirit will work in you in ways neither you nor we will fully know, but we do believe it will, and for the good of you and anyone you love as God loves you.

The church you are now part of is going through a time of struggle as its membership diminishes, as so many churches here in Canada are, and so it is people like you who are affirming their faith who are so important to the church's present and future life. We need people like you and give thanks for your commitment to continuing your faith journey within it.

No matter where your life takes you as you continue your school studies, your participation in social activities, your faith journey, your work, or whatever else you may be involved in, we pray and hope that the Holy Spirit may fill and inspire you to be people of love, people of hope, people of joy, people of peace, and people of grace.

May God be your constant companion for the rest of your life through the presence of God's Holy Spirit. Amen.

