

Sermon: September 17, 2023

"We all need confirmation"

Yesterday morning I dug a hole in the ground ... in our "back 40." We gathered to bury the ashes of a young lady who grew up here. She was confirmed here. She left us too early at the age of 34. She had an incredibly courageous journey with cancer. I think of the passage of time. The young people in my first confirmation class are now about 62 years old. Makes me feel kind-old!!

As we gathered to say "good-bye" ... Susie's young son Tony was runnin' around. I'm not sure what he's thinking, or if he even understands what's going on. I give all the kids a little stuffed animal --- "hey, this is a present from your mom!!" THANKS, MOM ... responds young Tony.

I look at this young 5-and-a-half year old. He's going to need "confirmation." Confirmation that his mom will never be forgotten. Confirmation that he will always be safe and loved. Maybe down the line --- confirmation there is a God ... a "Higher Power" ... who will nurture and guide him.

This brings me to what CONFIRMATION really means. Today 11 of our young people are being confirmed. On the surface ... this means they become officially "adult members" of the church. They are "confirmed Lutheran." Well confirmation is not about being Lutheran. It's about being "who you are" ... it's about your soul and spirit.

Back in the day ... I mean, way back ... I had confirmation class on Saturday morning. I also had basketball practice. My coach and pastor were both pretty inflexible. Hey, if you don't come to practice ... you won't play much in the games. And then my pastor ---- if you don't come to class, you won't be confirmed. I spent a lot of time going to class ... and being angry that I couldn't be at practice.

A few years ago ... I had a girl in confirmation, who was an incredible dancer. It was her life and her passion. She had practice on the same night as confirmation. I told her and her parents ---- you gotta go to dance ... it's at the very heart of who you are. She only came to couple classes ... so, as confirmation day approached, her parents said to me: "I know she can't be confirmed ... she only made a couple classes." Our church's response: Oh, she will be confirmed. We respect and honor what her true passion is. This is part of what our church and confirmation are all about.

There was a young lady who didn't come to class at all this year. I called and talked to her mom. She said her daughter is struggling about what it means to believe God. She really feels like she is not ready to be "confirmed." Our church's response ----- it's ok. Doubts and struggles are a part of our journey. She isn't here today ... but she is still a part of who we are as a church. I guess she needs "confirmation" that it's ok to doubt and to be human and to be true to yourself.

I can't speak for you but -----I need "confirmation" every day. Confirmation that I make a difference in this world. I need confirmation as a person, as a man. I need confirmation in my job ... in my relationship to God. Confirmation that it's ok not to be perfect and to struggle.

Back "in the day" ... confirmation was like a "test." You had to prove yourself worthy to be a member ---- going to class, memorizing a few things. I remember wondering on Saturday mornings ... who is taking my place on the basketball court??!! In many ways today ----- we have to prove ourselves worthy: at work, at school.

But ... in our lives ... there need to be places and spaces where acceptance, and grace, and kindness come first. This is not about being Lutheran or Catholic or Jewish or Protestant ... it's about being a child of God, and being true to yourself.

There is a young man I'm thinking about this morning.
I remember him as a little kid ... coming to church ... eventually being confirmed.
I can still see his red hair blowing in the wind.

Well ... like what happens so often in life ... we go our separate ways.
He had his share of struggles. Haven't seen him in a long time.
This week he died unexpectedly at the age of 33.

Yes, I can still see him.
He may have been "Lutheran" for only a little while.
Most important: he was God's child for 33 years ... and still is from his perch in heaven.
That is the promise. That is what matters.

The rain today reminds me of God's tears.
God cries when his children hurt.
The sun will come out later on ... pointing us to "God's son" ... whose hands
carry and sustain us every day.

If we can dig deep ... and really believe this ...
we discover once again what "confirmation" is all about.

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