

Well, here we are - Confirmation time. I want to thank our three confirmands for their two years of attending confirmation class, doing service projects, attending confirmation camp, and, of course, taking sermon notes. I'm sure you won't mind stopping taking those, although if you want to continue there are always more forms available.

Last week I met with the class to go over the rite of confirmation and I talked about what it means. They were all baptized as infants and they had no say in the matter. Well, they may have screamed their little heads off in protest but the baptism happened anyway. Their parents made promises on their behalf to bring them up in the covenant of their baptism as a part of a community of faith. That they had no say is actually significant because it shows the way God works. In baptism God makes them his children. He chooses them. That automatically gives them value, status, and a position that no one can ever take away from them.

Now at confirmation we use the Affirmation of Baptism service. Today they get to speak for themselves. No one else will speak for them. While they cannot actually undo their baptism - that's a thing in the past and you can't undo it - they intend to affirm it; to take ownership of it. And of course most especially to recognize that who they are is indeed deeply and totally rooted in the person God makes them. If the confirmation program has done its job they should know that, for confirmation is not about teaching them intellectual facts to be believed. It is about teaching them who they are and what God has done for them.

Of course that then begs a question. What do you do now? Many people see confirmation as a sort of 'graduation from church' sort of event. You may remember that I've said before the church does indeed have a graduation ceremony; except we don't call it "Confirmation". We don't call it "Graduation" either. The name we've given it is "Funeral."

All too often people disappear from church after confirmation. You've probably heard the old joke about the church that had bats in its steeple. No one could get rid of

them. Exterminators were called to no affect. Finally, inspiration struck the pastor and he baptized and confirmed the bats and they were never seen again.

Now I'm not going to try to guilt you into keep coming to church. I know all too well that guilt isn't effective. Plus, the situation is a lot more complicated than that. I know that for all intents and purposes church is basically irrelevant to the life of an eighth grader. Words like sin, salvation, grace, and eternal life are simply not a part of your daily lives. You are more interested in discovering who you are. You are trying to figure out how you fit into your community of peers, and recognize the world of adults drawing ever closer. You are exploring the ever greater freedom your parents are giving you. You are discovering what it means to misuse that freedom, to make mistakes; maybe to feel guilty about them, maybe to try to hide them.

In only a couple years the State of New York will say you can legally drive on the highways - always a scary thought. And you will realize that when allowed control of a car you have

been given the power of life and death of yourself and others based on your judgments and decisions.

You're busy. School and extracurricular activities will probably drive you at an exhausting pace. But you'll discover that if you don't keep up with that pace you'll be left in the dust by those who are.

This is not to say I am content to let the church become a thing of your past. I am only acknowledging the forces of reality as they will come upon you and the complexity they bring to your lives.

Some people are content to say, "Well, let them go. When they get settled and have a family they'll be back." I for one am not content with that. If current trends continue many won't come back. Period. And those who do have made all the fundamental decisions that will affect the rest of their lives without having a community of faith as they make those decisions.

In you now are questions which will be running through every day of your lives. They will be with you until the day you die. They are like, "What am I here for? Is this all there is? What do I have to do to be fulfilled?"

With all of that in mind, I say this. Confirmation was not about teaching you facts about God and the church. It was not giving you the doctrines the church says you are supposed to believe. It was not about making you conform or shaping you into what the church wants you to be.

It was about opening you to the truth of God's never failing presence in your life, trusting that the answers to those never ending questions come from God, and inviting you to trust in God's answer to them - trust in it strongly enough to let your life be built around it.

Five years ago I gave a sermon and included the song *Creed* by Rich Mullins and the Ragamuffin Band. It is basically the Apostles' Creed set to music. And I want to play it again. The words are in your bulletins if you want to follow along.

Creed: Performed by Rich Mullins and the Ragamuffin Band

I believe in God the Father

Almighty maker of heaven

And maker of earth

And in Jesus Christ

His only begotten Son, our Lord

He was conceived by the Holy Spirit

Born of the Virgin Mary

Suffered under Pontius Pilate

He was crucified and dead and buried

And I believe what I believe

It's what makes me what I am

I did not make it

No, it is making me

It is the very Truth of God

Not the invention of any man

I believe that he who suffered

Was crucified buried and dead

He descended into hell and

On the third day, rose again

He ascended into heaven

Where he sits in God's mighty right hand

I believe that he is returning

To judge the quick and the dead

and the sons of Man

*And I believe what I believe
It's what makes me what I am
I did not make it
No, it is making me
It is the very Truth of God,
Not the invention of any man
I believe it
I believe it
I believe it
I believe, I believe it.*

I believe in God the Father
Almighty maker of heaven,
maker of earth
And in Jesus Christ
His only begotten Son, our Lord
I believe in the Holy Spirit
One holy Church
The Communion of saints
The forgiveness of sin
I believe in the resurrection
I believe in a life that never ends

*And I believe what I believe
It's what makes me what I am
I did not make it,
No, it is making me.
I did not make it,*

No, it is making me.

I said, I did not make it,

No, it is making me.

It is the very Truth of God,

Not the invention of any man.

I believe it. (Repeated various times)

In a few minutes you will be saying the Apostles' Creed in front of the whole congregation. They will not be speaking, but listening. When we speak that creed we are not saying so much of what we intellectually believe in our heads, but we are voicing the Truth that is the driving force of our lives.

Today you make the same acknowledgment.

We all have our doubts and questions, our fears and our failings. Sometimes God seems too distant, too unbelievable. Sometimes God appears to be unfair. Sometimes faith just seems like too much of a pain - one more demand on an already overburdened life - and we want to quit.

Yet it is God's work, promised at baptism, driving us forward and perfectly making us. God has created the relationship. Not us. Live the Truth of what God is doing. You did not make it. No, it is making you. Amen