

Pentecost 0C Confirmation
Peace, Seattle
June 9, 2019
Acts 2:1-21, Genesis 11:1-9, John 14:8-17

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Did you notice the very Lutheran question in our lesson from ACTS: **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**¹

- **Bewildered and befuddled** by their experience of wind and flame...
- **Dumbfounded** by the sudden breach in the language barrier...
- **Those followers of Jesus find themselves in territory they've never seen before. And it drives their CURIOSITY about the meaning behind it all.**

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

And isn't that the same question that dogs us all—and that will follow you, dear Confirmands—as you make your way step by step through the world of teenage-hood and then adulthood—coming face to face with new situations and possibilities for how to hold faith and experience together while you listen for the steady voice of the Advocate to help you navigate it all—**what does this mean?**

During our two years together I've watched your minds open up as we've explored how God's story and our stories fit together. Truth be told, there is never an end to that exploration. Like the song says, WE ARE PILGRIMS ON A JOURNEY, WE ARE TRAV'LERS ON THE ROAD...

We're here because we want the kind of faith that will stick with us for the long haul. Faith like that doesn't stay static by keeps moving, keeps exploring, and matures as it grows.

And Jesus has been our steady companion all along the way as we've shared high and lows, prayed for one another, blessed one another, gone on retreats together.

Do you remember our first retreat back in the fall of 2017?

When we got on the ferry and headed to Vashon some of us were strangers to each other and didn't really know each other. But we played icebreakers, and went geocaching, exploring the island, and by the end of that day something wonderful had happened—we had begun to form a community.

Fast forward to our final retreat at the Grunewald Guild and what a difference!

You see part of the role of the Holy Spirit—and we see this in the story from Acts—is to help us break out of old patterns and to embrace new ones; to expand our circle of friends.

And I for one am grateful for how we have entered this process together, have shared a taste of community, and have grown in our understanding of God's story and our place in it; and what it means to walk in the world as Jesus walked.

Today you are publicly affirming your trust in the One who called and claimed you in the waters of baptism and who promises to journey with you throughout this life—wherever it may takes you.

¹ This two-part sermon on Confirmation Sunday begins with Pastor Kindem preaching and ends with co-teacher and Director of Youth and Family Ministry Nicole Klinemeier.

Of course you didn't arrive here today alone. Those who love you—some of whom are here today—have done their part in bringing you to the Font and to the Table.

And they've been joined by mentors and others in this congregation and beyond who've nurtured your growth in faith, and who—whether near at hand or far away—have celebrated your joys and shared your sorrows.

Their voices are voices you've learned to trust, and that's an increasingly rare gift these days—finding voices you can trust.

One of the takeaways from our first lesson about the TOWER OF BABEL is that if the goal we set is all about making a name FOR OURSELVES, then the venture is bound to fail.

There are many voices in our culture that call us to look out for ourselves first, last, and always. But Jesus shows us a different way...the way of community where, as St. Paul says, when one suffers, all suffer; when one rejoices, all rejoice. That's what it means to be the body of Christ!

On Pentecost we learn that the way to reach God isn't through building bigger and taller emblems of ego, but by opening our ears to hear the voice of the OTHER—and finding in their speech the message God wants us to hear.

The question everyone was asking that day—WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?—is a question we keep on asking because faith is a living thing, and faith that lives doesn't simply repeat the answers of previous generations, it engages in a conversation of its own.

And really, that's what we—what you—have been about these last two years:

- Entering into a conversation with the faith you have received from parents, grandparents, congregation and tradition;
- Moving toward a place of deeper understanding and curiosity in matters of faith,
- Beginning the process of finding your own voice in it all,
- and today, affirming this faith that is now becoming your own.

Of course, affirming your faith today doesn't mean that all the questions have been answered, all the tensions resolved, all the issues settled. The truth is, some of the best questions are still ahead of you, waiting to be discovered, probed, and lived.

In that sense your Confirmation today is closer to a beginning than it is an ending. But at the same time, as we look back, we can see that we've come a long way, and that is worth a great deal.

One of my favorite writers, Frederick Buechner, once wrote that **faith is a journey without maps**.

Growing in our understanding of God's purpose for us, growing in our awareness of the gifts God has planted in us is a lifelong journey. A journey in which we keep faith close at hand even while we bump up against life's uncertainties and surprises—and life is full of them!

And the good news is— we don't have to go through them alone. We have a family, a community that will stand by, with and for us, come hell or high water...and that's the truth.

Hailey, Hudson, Phoebe, Dan, Kai—today you are taking the next step along the journey of faith. We give thanks for who you are and who you're becoming. We love you.

[Part 2, Nicole Klinemeier]

This class of confirmation students is a lot of fun. They are musicians, artists, athletes, and students. They have active family lives—all great. But it did mean that getting this crew together was... difficult. But when we did get together, what a great time.

I have a lot of wonderful memories from our time together. Recently we went to the Grunewald Guild near Leavenworth for our final retreat. Our drive up had a few, let's call them, challenges.

Phoebe always had her homework done. Confirmands had Bible reading journals to complete between classes. I'd do a check in with the group and see how they were doing. Lots of "um, well, I'm on this page and I'm going to work on this soon, um, yeah."

Then I would turn to Phoebe. She would just simply say she was completely up to date and finished with her assignment. Now this matter of fact, simply stated quality would visit us on the retreat when she asked for a bag and said she was going to be sick in what has got to be the calmest way anyone in the history of van rides on a curvy mountain road has ever said it!

This is when Dan jumps into action. Dan, he has the big picture in mind, he sees what is happening around him, takes notice, and cares for his friends. This is why he was able to have what must have been record speed grabbing of a plastic bag no one else even remembered was there and handed it off to make sure Phoebe was ok. One nose bleed later, someone else, we arrived at our destination and after some good rest everyone was recovered.

Day 2 of the retreat, we are having our second meal prepared by our Grunewald Guild hosts and have gathered in a circle for the meal blessing with the community. The director asked if anyone would like to pray. Who speaks up right away? Dan. With the ice broken, a role Dan took often, other members of the class took their turn leading meal prayers. Not once did Pastor Erik or I ask them to do this.

This is a reflection of who they are. When we got together they took our time seriously. The class sessions always were full of good conversation, questions, and reflection.

Before the van ride took a turn on those curves mentioned earlier, everyone was busily making friendship bracelets. I think a few of them for the first time. Hudson brought the supplies and was helping everyone with what they needed including instruction. This is a great snapshot of who Hudson is - a great friend who includes everyone, has the supplies, shares, and leads the group in an activity. Later that night I had to gently remind Hudson to turn off her light and put her book down. (To be fair to Hudson, Erik asked me if I was done reading the next night.)

Hailey is a team player. And a great addition to this class. Easy to smile, but certainly does not want to be the center of attention, which came in handy during the hide and seek tag game on the retreat. Even when Hailey didn't have a lot to say, I knew she was paying attention. Hailey watched and listened until she was ready to add her contribution. I enjoyed hearing what she had to say because I knew her question or comment would be sincere. Sincere is a good word for her.

Never in the history of confirmation have I met someone quite as enthusiastic about it as Kai. Kai loved confirmation. All of it...except the homework. He loved the class and retreats and anytime we were together. On that ride to the Grunewald Guild he had several games planned out for everyone to play. Sometimes he was so enthusiastic I had to remind him that other people might want to answer the question.

There is so much more I wish we would have had time for during our class sessions. In the end though, all the information I would like to pour into your head is not as important—will never be as important—as you all knowing how much Christ loves each and every one of you.

The Spirit will stay working in you, in your hearts and minds. You have time to go deeper, to learn more, make more connections, wonder, and explore. All those questions, doubts, and troubles you will experience in your life have likely already be asked, worried over, and examined by the many people who've traveled the path before you.

Stay connected, so you will continue to have support. Stay connected, so that the next cohort that follows you can learn from you. Stay connected because we need each other. In community it is not only what we get, but what we give. You have a lot to give.

[CONFIRMANDS EACH SHARE PORTIONS OF WHAT THEY'VE WRITTEN ON THE FIVE BAPTISMAL COVENANTS.]

[Erik Kindem]

Let's thank God for the gifts we see in our Confirmands.

I invite you to take out a red hymnal and to turn to page 304. At the bottom of the page you'll find the Venture prayer that I invite us to pray together:

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.