

Sermon for Sunday, November 22, 2015
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
The Very Rev. Canon Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley and Confirmands

This week
is the last week
of the Church's year.
Next Sunday
we begin all over again
with the first Sunday of Advent,
and the anticipation
of the birth of our Savior.

And it is particularly appropriate at this time
that we hear from our young adults
who were confirmed last month.
Our bishop requires a full year of preparation for confirmation;
as part of that, they have participated in J2A, which stands for Journey to Adulthood,
meeting every week after the service,
and for the last three months have met regularly with me.
We've worked our way through
the whole Baptismal Covenant,
exploring what it means
to take on each of the promises.
We've talked about participating in worship;
we've done the rite of reconciliation;
we've practiced talking about who Jesus is for a minute;
we've put our words into action at the food pantry.
And today they will tell you about what confirmation means to them.
But before they do that, they have demanded
that I do the same!

I was confirmed
back in 1980.
The reason I wanted to be confirmed
was that my best friend at church
was the priest's daughter
and she was allowed to count out
the little cubes of wonder bread
that we used for communion.

I wasn't, because I wasn't confirmed.
So I decided
I needed to be confirmed...so I could count out the cubes of bread too.

But to be confirmed
you needed to be baptized, and I wasn't baptized.
Although we had attended church every single week
since I was born,
my parents had wanted it to be a real decision of faith for me.
Of course, the best laid plans go astray - they hadn't anticipated counting out cubes of
wonder bread being a factor!
But a week before my confirmation
I was baptized in our parish church.
I can't remember that,
or anything about the Confirmation,
except that I was wearing a Little House on the Prairie type dress - remember, it was
1980! - and my brother was crucifer.
But I do remember
receiving the Eucharist for the first time
the night before.
Our parish
had a prayer retreat that day,
which culminated in the Eucharist.
I prayed all day,
and then
for the first time
received the Eucharist.
And I remember
after years of having a strong faith
and sensing a call to some kind of full time Christian ministry, what kind I wasn't sure -
in Australia
ordination wasn't an option for women at that time -
after years of having a strong faith
but never feeling like I really belonged,
I remember finally feeling
a real member of the church.

Confirmation for me
didn't so much mark a change in anything outward -
I was already reading in church regularly,

played my violin in the service every week,
and had been expected to tithe my allowance
from when I was in kindergarten -
what changed
was that I was now responsible for my own Christian life.
All my life
my parents had been responsible for helping me to be a follower of Jesus;
now it was up to me.

That was what confirmation meant to me -
now I invite you to hear from our young adults.

Sean Glogg

When you are Christened someone else makes that decision for you and speaks for you. You're then brought up in the church, go to Sunday school classes, and learn all about God, Jesus, and the stories in the Bible. Then it's on to Confirmation classes and eventually you are confirmed. However, now you decide and you speak for yourself. When you're confirmed you are making the mature decision to continue in a relationship with God. Confirmation is not a graduation. It is not the end. It does, however, mark the beginning of your Christian life as an adult. You are confirming your faith in God and become filled with the Holy Spirit. But what does it mean to be an adult Christian, filled with the Holy Spirit, and in a relationship with God? Does it mean nothing bad will ever happen to you, you'll never be scared, or feel pain? No, but it does mean that you have a heavenly Father who will help you through it and you'll be better off for it when you come out at the other end. It might be best explained with a little story about a lump of clay.

There once was a lump of clay. There was nothing special about it. One day a potter took it, rolled it, pounded it, and patted it all over. It yelled, "Leave me alone!" The potter responded with a simple, "Not yet." The clay was then placed on a spinning wheel and spun around and around. It got so dizzy it cried, "Let me off!" But the potter just said, "Not yet." The clay was molded and placed in an oven. It got so hot that it screamed, "Let me out!" But the potter quietly replied, "Not yet." To its relief, the clay was then left to cool for a while, but not for too long. Soon after it had dried the potter painted him. The fumes from the paint were so bad that the clay choked out, "Stop it!" But the potter remained firm, saying "Not yet." The clay was then returned to the oven. This time, it was much hotter inside. It was so hot that the clay became afraid and he began to cry. Just when he was about to lose all hope the potter took him out and placed him before a mirror. Staring back at him was a very beautiful teacup. The potter said, "I know it hurts to be rolled, patted, and pounded, but if I had left you alone you would have dried up. I know that spinning you around makes you dizzy, but if I hadn't done that you would've crumbled. I also know it was hot in the oven, but if I hadn't done that you would have cracked. I know too that the paint fumes were bad, but if I hadn't painted you, you wouldn't have hardened. And I knew it would be even hotter in the oven the second time around, but if I hadn't returned you, you would have not held up. It was hard but you came through it and I was there with you the entire time. Now you are as beautiful and unique as what I had in mind when I first saw you.

So when life feels like it is pounding you down, spinning you around, suffocating you, and burning you to the point that you are afraid and want to scream and cry remember God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit will help you through it and you will be better for it. Wouldn't you rather go through it with someone guiding you then being stuck in it all by yourself? You may end up stronger, kinder, wiser, less judgmental, more sympathetic and

patient. You will be a better you, live a better life, be a better example. And everyone will see what an extraordinarily beautiful teacup you are.

Lindsey Noack

When I started to think about this year and about how I was going to be confirmed, I thought well, I have to go through the same confirmation classes as my brothers, then attend a ceremony at the cathedral for about an hour or so, then we leave and that's it. But through my confirmation classes over the past couple of weeks, I've been pushed to think more about what it means rather than just the process. Through being confirmed I was saying, "I want to follow Jesus Christ. I want to be his disciple just like those first disciples who dropped everything and followed Jesus." That idea translated to me that through confirmation I was accepting the ways of his teachings. When we get confirmed we are renewing the promises our parents made for us at baptism. In confirmation we are accepting the gift of the Holy Spirit as mature adults. At baptism, we had absolutely no idea what was going on and our parents decided that we should be episcopalians; but now through our confirmation we are making that decision on our own. Through this sacrament we hope to become better members of the episcopal church community and to continue to love God above all things. We also are now seen as adult members of this church community. Through confirmation I received the qualities and gifts of wisdom, understanding, right judgment, knowledge, and courage, and these gifts will help me to become better examples as God's children.

Emily Mauro

To me confirmation means being viewed as an adult in the church. I think that it means that you are able to make your own decisions and share your opinions regarding how you view certain topics or feel about certain things, and they will be listened by the rest of the congregation as well as respected and maybe even agreed with. I think that it is important to eventually be confirmed because everyone should have a sense of respect from their peers as well as feeling as though their personal thoughts and feelings are important and other people want to listen to them. One of the things we did during confirmation class was the confession and forgiveness of our sins. Sean, Lindsay, Raewynne and I all wrote down some of the things we had done that we wanted God to forgive us for and went on the altar with them. We then placed them into a bowl and burned them until there was just ashes remaining, symbolizing that God had forgiven our sins. I found that this particular exercise was very therapeutic and gave me a physical sense of forgiveness. Although we have the confession and forgiveness of sins every Sunday in church as a congregation, I think that if I were to feel really guilty or as if I had to get something off my chest in the future, I would go back to this exercise in order to feel truly forgiven, and for a more personal feel. Overall, I have found that out of everything we did, I thought that this exercise that we did stood out the most to me and gave me a better sense of what confirmation really is. Now, at the end of all our sessions together, I feel as though I now know what it means to be confirmed, as well as the feeling of being accepted as an adult in the church.