

It's What We Do

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher
Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio
May 22, 2022—Sixth Sunday in Eastertide--Confirmation

2 Corinthians 5:16-20a (NRSV)

¹⁶ So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. ¹⁷ So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!

¹⁸ All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹ In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation.

²⁰ So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, "Be reconciled to God!"

Today we have a special observance as part of our worship. Two young men are being confirmed. When they were very young, their parents presented them before the church to receive the sacrament of baptism. One of those baptisms occurred in this church, the other one in an Episcopal church. But the place where they were baptized or which denomination within the Christian Church performed the baptism isn't what's most important. What's important is that they are baptized in the worldwide church of Jesus Christ. Wherever in the world they may go in their lives—vacationing across the country, studying abroad, going to college in another state, touring foreign countries—no matter where they may find themselves, they are part of the worldwide body of Jesus Christ wherever they are.

As part of our congregation's confirmation process, for the past year these young people have been mentored by mature, thoughtful adult members of this congregation. Together they've studied the Bible. They've explored what it means to be engaged in the life and the outreach of a local church. They've deepened their prayer life. They've pondered how God has been at work in their lives to this point. They've grown more open to how God might work through them to soothe the world, to serve the vulnerable, and to shape society so that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

If it sounds like these two confirmands have accomplished a lot and grown a lot in the past year, that's right. But the church's act of confirmation represents more than *their* personal achievement. It's also about what *all of you* have done.

You see, when a child is baptized, it's not just the parents who make promises. You do, too. When you witness a baptism you make promises on behalf of all the members of this congregation. You make promises on behalf of all Presbyterian

Christians. Indeed, you make promises on behalf of the worldwide Christian Church in all of its expressions: Lutheran, Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, Congregational, Baptist, and more. You speak on behalf of the worldwide church, accepting responsibility for these newcomers to the faith. There are three parts to the promises the worldwide Christian church makes to those being baptized. You promise:

1. To tell them the story of Jesus;
2. To guide them in following the example of Jesus; and
3. To ensure they feel welcome in the church family.

How did you do that? I say you did that by striving to fulfill the guidance of the scriptures—not simply telling them Bible stories, but trying your best to *show* them how to follow Jesus. Let me share some verses of scripture that capture how you’ve done that:

- 1) Because Jesus said, *“For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them,”*¹ you helped them realize that even humble gatherings evoke a sense of the presence of Jesus.
- 2) The book called Acts tells us: *“Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts....”*² You showed them that faith in Jesus can shape every dimension of one’s life.
- 3) The New Testament’s Letter to the Hebrews says: *“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another....”*³ So you showed them that gathering with fellow Christians encourages us for our acts of worship and service.
- 4) You also encouraged them to show compassion toward others, as we hear in Galatians: *“Help carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ,”* and also in Romans, *“Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.”*⁴
- 5) And you’ve shown them that even when there’s no specific thing we can do to assist or comfort someone else, we can follow the urging of the Letter of James which reminds us, simply, *“...Pray for each other....”*⁵
- 6) One of the realities of the Christian community that surprises those outside the community is that, despite the diversity often found in churches—coming from different communities and backgrounds, different socioeconomic strata, having different perspectives on social and political issues, and more—despite the many differences that we may manifest, we embrace this truth stated in Romans: *“...We are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other.”*⁶

¹ Matthew 18:20 GNT

² Acts 2:46 NRSVUE

³ Hebrews 10:25 NIV

⁴ Galatians 6:2 GNT and Romans 12:15 NRSVUE

⁵ James 5:16 NIV

⁶ Romans 12:5 CEB

- 7) You also embodied this instruction in Romans: *"Live in harmony with one another...."*⁷ Harmony doesn't consist of all the same note; harmony occurs when different notes work together. You've been a living example of how we can embrace different viewpoints while coming together because our love for Jesus Christ is more important than our differences.
- 8) In John's gospel Jesus declared, *"This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you."*⁸ You've shown how we try to be like Jesus in loving not only relatives and friends, but also loving and accepting strangers and those who we don't see eye-to-eye with.
- 9) Another biblical truth you've taught comes from First Letter of Peter which urges, *"And serve each other according to the gift each person has received, as good managers of God's diverse gifts."*⁹ You've helped them see that though we don't all have the same skills, talents, resources and experiences, that's not a deficit but a blessing!
- 10) Indeed, you've shown how a spirit of generosity is rooted deeply within us, as the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy says, *"Give to [those in need] freely and unselfishly, and the Lord will bless you in everything you do."*¹⁰

You've embodied the guidance of scripture by your character, your attitude, your words, and your actions. You may not have realized that you have been teaching. "It's what we do," you may think. But because of what you do, others want to be part of you. They choose to be with you. They commit their lives to following Jesus and showing his example because of you.

For these two young men, their confirmation process is done. But for each of us, our work as ambassadors of Christ goes on. As they choose to join us in this lifelong calling, may we continue to embody the generous and unconditional love of Jesus. May we continue to show God's merciful forgiveness and gracious acceptance to a world so in need of healing. Because we have been claimed as followers of Jesus, "it's what we do."

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⁷ Romans 12:16 NRSVUE

⁸ John 15:12 CEB

⁹ 1 Peter 4:10 CEB

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 15:10 GNT