

A New Family

A sermon preached by

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May 21, 2017 – Confirmation Sunday

John 14:15-21

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”

¹⁸ “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

This morning is one of my favorite days in the church year. It doesn't have all of the crowds of Easter or Christmas Eve. There aren't too many confirmation hymns or bible stories, yet Confirmation Sunday is important for a couple of reasons.

First, for those of you who are being confirmed, this marks an important time in your lives. It represents a time when you are choosing a faith community and a set of faith convictions. Now that doesn't mean you have absolute certainty about these things. If you talked to your parents or other adults in the church they would probably say that they are still working on this certainty “thing.” But it does say that you are choosing a lens through which you will be understanding the world and yourselves. This lens helps you see what is right and wrong, what is just and unjust, the value of hope and the promise of love.

The second reason that Confirmation Sunday is important is because of what it signifies to the church as a whole. By your taking these vows, the church is being given hope in our future. We'll be looking to you to lead the church, to guide our ministries, to become pastors and lay people in the church, to support our causes. In short, you are helping us to be and to become the body of Christ together.

Most of you are getting ready to graduate from eighth grade, you are looking forward to high school and a new phase in your lives. But as Jane said earlier this week during our rehearsal for this service, confirmation isn't graduation from the church. And it is our expectation that you'll be active and faithful members as you make your way through high school and continue to be a part of us.

Have you ever had a friend move away, leave town, and you worried that you wouldn't see them again? In the gospel lesson this morning, Jesus' friends, his disciples, are worried because he is leaving them. If they were your age today, they would have sat together in class, gone to the mall or the movies, eaten doughnuts together in the confirmation room. But now Jesus and his friends are going to be separated. In fact by the time John was written, this had already happened. Jesus was gone and all that was left were the memories.

So Jesus says to his friends, don't worry, I will give you another Advocate. That word advocate is unusual. In the Greek it is paraclete. Now that's a strange sounding word isn't it! But it isn't a bird or a soccer shoe. Paraclete means something else. It appears only five times in the bible, and in many English translations the word "Advocate" has been substituted.

But it is a word with many meanings, and the author of the Gospel of John intended *all* of its meanings, not just the single aspect of advocacy. Literally it means "to call to one's side." While neither parakeets nor cleats factor into this broad definition, Comforter, Advocate, Counselor, and Helper do. More specifically, according to John, the Paraclete comes to abide with us and to speak on Jesus' behalf; to teach and remind us of all that Jesus has said to us, to reveal truth and testify on Jesus' behalf, to keep alive all that Jesus said and did.

In other words, Jesus is saying, "I've got your back!"

When someone has your back, they are there to support you unconditionally. When life seems to blindside you with undesirable events, that person is there for you without complaint, supporting you in your moment of need, not for their own selfish needs, but because your well being is foremost in their mind and heart.

Someone that has your back recognizes the goodness, even the greatness in you, especially during the moments you're not willing or able to see it in yourself. Simply stated, when someone has your back, your life is greatly enhanced.

So as you prepare for taking these confirmation vows, I want you to know that we have your back. We are here for you, we love you and we will do all in our power to make that love be the thing that will carry you through your life. And part of what we are asking you to do and be is someone who offers this kind of comfort, advocacy, counseling, and help to others. Because today you are taking another step in this new family called the church that has and will continue to embrace you.