

# “The Super Eight”

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26, I John 5:9-13, John 17:6-19

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From the Pulpit

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A sermon delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Easter 7, May 16, 2021, dedicated to the Confirmation class of 2021 and Lennon Trautman on her baptismal day as she grows in Christ's love and always to the glory of God!

## **“The Super Eight”**

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26, I John 5:9-13, John 17:6-19

I decided to share my reflection about the Super Eight today from the baptismal font, and I have chosen this for a very specific reason. This font sits on the stone where couples share their wedding vows. Of the six sets of parents who bring their children to confirmation, three couples were married here. Of the eight children that come to make their vows of confirmation, five of them were baptized here.

This is the place we return. In real time, in the 88 other years that we have had confirmation here on this day at this time of year, we would have been here with kneeler and a full congregation of family and friends. We come here today to remember and to celebrated, would you join me in prayer.

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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Well, you've already seen enough, I mean you've seen Mr. Jones, Mr. Williams, Rev. Corzine, Ms. Blair and me with unicorn crowns on. That was enough for the day, that was a testimony of faith, that was testifying to our faith today. And you've seen the Super 8 step up and speak their vows of baptismal grace, of confirmation. So, it has been great already.

I just want to share a few words. We have been in a season of love in case you haven't been paying attention through the Easter season. One week after another in the Gospel of John and in the letters of John we've been hearing about the love that holds us together as people of faith in Christ. And some of you may remember that the entire Lenten journey was "A journey back to love."

So, we have been talking love, living love since February 17th in worship. That's a long time and we're just getting started because the whole faith journey is really a journey of love. Today's witness is a witness of love, and a witness of truth to the gospel that is all about loving one another. That's really what it all comes down to. There are a lot of people that will tell you that we have to judge those who aren't just like we are. That's not what Jesus said. Don't listen to that. Listen to your heart, listen to the heart of love that speaks within you.

Listen to the gospel that cries out to you. Even in choosing of the 12th disciple in Acts – which confirms that the first church was a Congregational church - they took a vote. They had to decide between one person or another. If that doesn't make the first church of Christians Congregational, I don't know what does.

When they choose, they choose Mathias, and they choose him for all of the gifts he has. So, gifts and love, truth in action is what our faith is about. And let me tell you about eight of the most remarkable Christians that I have been honored to know – eight young people that put faith into action.

They are Lila, Elias, Jake, Maya, Ruby, Elijah, Sam and Abby. With their teachers, Jackie Dean, Jonathan Miller and me joining together with their parents who were a part of teaching in this process, they took a remarkable journey this year. And I can tell you it's a journey like no other confirmation class has ever had.

There were things that they were denied including regular lunches with each other, field trips to mosques, synagogues and other churches, and just simply getting to know each other across the table and through time. They didn't have those kinds of opportunities.

What they did have though was in the fall they met outside and then they met on Zoom when we could no longer provide the safety of the setting that was. And what I learned from them was this – they learned a lot this year. Several of them told me as we were meeting that they read the Bible. One actually texted me, "is it ok to read the whole Bible?" And I said, yes, go for it! They brought a zeal and a love for what they were doing.

Not all of them had any long experience with First Church. For example, Lila and Abby came to us for this reason, for confirmation to be with us on this journey. In fact, when Lila stepped into the sanctuary last Sunday morning for her baptism it was the first time, she and her family had ever stepped foot in the church. And the first thing she did was come to this font to

dedicate her life to Jesus Christ. You talk about faith! I'd like to see that for all for us to have that kind of faith. And Lila is not just faithful, she is a remarkable, faithful young woman, she is also fast. Yesterday at the state championship, she and her track relay team in the 440 finished 3rd in the state as the fastest team and they broke their school record by 5 seconds. I didn't even know you could get 5 seconds off a record in the 440. That is really fast. So, she's fast, she's smart, she is committed to action in Christ.

She is the one that came up with one of our offerings today, the Franklinton Farms because she wants to garden with those who have nothing. Those who have no gardens, those who have no fresh produce, she wants to be there with her hands in the soil. And then I told her this was an offering, she said you mean we don't get to work in the garden and I said, well we can but we take an offering first. So that's Lila.

And Elias is a rising leader in the scouts. I've known him since he came to this font as a baby. I've known him since the day he was born, and he's stepping into leadership and shown he's shown remarkable progress and he loves being a leader. He has learned so many skills from scouting. And he's faithful, he's remarkably faithful and gifted in the way he approaches everything and everyone.

Jake is chill. There's no other word for Jake. Jake is just really cool. He's calm, but on the soccer field or volleyball court he's fast and furious. Jake is a smart, wonderful, exceptional, loving young man.

Maya, his sister, is like an old soul. Some of you know Maya because she's a rock star. She's been in the Columbus Dispatch more than anybody I know. Along with Mr. Mark and the other teens who put the flags in the earth to remember the 582,000 who have died of COVID in America, Maya has been there every step of the way, through the cold days and the days of spring. She has continued to be faithful, and she's that way with everything she does. And also - Maya is a great athlete!

They're all really great athletes.

Ruby's "athletics" are in theater. She's remarkably gifted as a writer, an actor, a behind the scenes person. She does it all in the theater and she loves the theater. She's really talented.

So, you've got all these very active, remarkable people, and then you've got the "prophet boys" – Elijah and Samuel. Ever since I baptized them, I said, "Ben and Lori, you not only have twins, you've got two prophets, so watch out for yourselves!" And you know what? They've lived into that prophetic sense of who they are. They've lived into the biblical calling of serving others and caring for the poor. They're great in lacrosse and Sam just made the all-star team and played last night in an all-star game. They're also really bright. They're the ones that wanted to read the bible. They're the ones that wanted to study more. And their parents were beside them all the way.

And Abby – is a great softball and volleyball star and brilliant in every imaginable way. I was telling others I had the chance to do a makeup session, a tutorial with Abby on Zoom. I saw how bright and gifted she was when I was in Zoom room talking to her one on one.

So, there you have it. We have all of these remarkable, young people. And where does this come from? Look to their parents. Their parents are remarkable people too who have not only guided them through confirmation this year but guided them in school. For any parent that has been on that journey with their child, you have been doing double and triple time as parent and teacher. They have been by their side through it all. You saw it, the love on their faces as they anointed their children with the oil of baptism.

It's been a wild year but if you want to know who these remarkable young people really are let me tell you one last story.

Just before Christmas I asked if anybody wanted to step up and help with Bethlehem on Broad Street. All of them raised their hands. And then on what was the most challenging Bethlehem on Broad Street ever, outside, on a really cold Christmas Day with wind and snow, every confirmand who was able to be there showed up. If their families were in town, they were at Bethlehem on Broad Street. It seemed like they made up half of the volunteers. They were remarkable and that's a memory they have but it shows who they are.

Then when Mr. Mark came to speak to them the other day, and they did their final reflection on confirmation all they could talk about was the youth mission trip. You want to know who these kids are? They are our next great servants of God. They're the ones rising to show us what it looks like to put faith into action.

And one last thing. I'm heartbroken to have gone through confirmation the way we did this year but they were a balm in Gilead for my heart. As I talked to them this past week on Zoom,

each one in their own way said, “It’s ok, Rev. Tim. We knew what we were doing. We were keeping the people of First Church safe and healthy. We did our part.”

Thanks be to God for these eight remarkable young people. They did their part. Watch what they do next. Amen.