

“Trinities at Confirmation”

Pentecost Sunday / Confirmation Sunday

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From the Pulpit

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It's First Church's tradition that on Confirmation Sunday, a confirmand delivers the sermon. In past years, we've had two and three confirmands volunteer. This year, none of our confirmands much wanted to speak – they've heard the way you talk about Reverend Tim and his sermons. I'm speaking in part because, for my first and last time, I got to serve the confirmation class in three different roles. I was parent to Finnegan, mentor to Trent and I was also assistant co-leader to the confirmation group. Confirmation brought a lot of trios, triads, trinities this year. This is my third time mentoring a confirmand. Every other Sunday, Finn and I would have three parts to our church morning – Sunday School, worship services and confirmation class. I volunteered to speak with the idea I would have three wholly different sets of perspectives and insights. I was wrong, of course.

As a parent during the confirmation year, you see very little. Your child disappears into their room with the confirmation book. When they came out, you ask. "Did you do the reading?"

"Yes."

"What did you think?"

"interesting."

You get to see your child leave with his mentor for nature hikes or lunch. When they come back, you ask, “How did it go?”

“Fine.”

“What did you guys talk about?”

“The stuff in the book.”

As an assistant co-leader, you see a little more. Reverend Tim will tell you these are, “The Super Six”. He says they have three thrilling qualities – that they are amazing, they are awe-inspiring, and they are wonderful. (Remember those words.) Jenny Provenzano would add that they are also sensational. There’s a fifth thing they often seemed to be – tired. Confirmation is a speed course in five thousand years of Judaeo-Christian history. It has to be crammed into eight months of two-hour sessions scheduled in-between school, homework, finals, practices, rehearsals, games, tournaments and something like a social life. As early as junior high, you can feel like you’re the pebble in a slingshot being drawn back. You can find yourself preparing furiously to be catapulted into a future. Why does First Church hold confirmation while the confirmands are in junior high? Because their responsibilities will only grow. These kids sacrificed something they don’t have much of. Adults, don’t laugh. They sacrificed free time.

As a parent and teacher, your view is limited. It's as a mentor that you see something special. You work with your confirmand on the fundamentals of our faith. You see them wrestle with complicated ideas, like the Trinity. When you have to explain these to someone else, you come to understand them better yourself. We worship one God – the God of Abraham. But at the very same time, he is three – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are inseparable, co-equal and co-eternal. Three that are one in essence, nature, power, action, and will. Each of you understand all of the meanings and implications of those terms, right? Are you ready for a quiz? 1,700 years ago, there might have been a quiz. We covered this in the class – the wrong answer could have lethal consequences.

That's not the case today. When you're invited to be mentor, Mark Williams lets you know you're not expected to know all of the answers. You only have to be willing to enter into a relationship – a three-way relationship, among you, your confirmand, and their parents. We don't have many relationships like this in today's society. You're an adult in the confirmand's life but you're not a parent or a family member. Not really a teacher and definitely not an authority figure. You're a guide. You cover the material but more importantly, you build connections and understanding with the student. To

serve in this role can take time and commitment, but it is amazing, it can be awe-inspiring, and it is wonderful. I want to thank Kity Helmer, and Jim and Mary Day Fewlass for inviting me into their home to build this new kind of fellowship. I'm grateful to Pete Boriin who gave his time to create this relationship with us.

Speaking as a teacher and a mentor and a parent – when you start to look for them, you see that threes run through our faith. In the Bible, threes symbolize stability, harmony and perfection. It's not just the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Bible itself consists of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Gospels and the New Testament. We have the three patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the three days Jonah spent in the belly of the great fish, three men in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace and three crosses on Calvary Hill. On the third day, Christ rose again. This brings us to a three that's much on our mind on Confirmation Sundays – the past, present and future.

You heard my son Finnegan read the story of Pentecost, of how people gathered in amazement to see the apostles. The apostles were each praising God with tongues of fire in languages they'd never spoken before. Years ago, in the past, his mother and I watched him say his first words. I hope you can each appreciate the amazement we feel to hear him read that passage and pronounce those place names.

You heard Cassidy Hopcraft read from Paul's letter to the Romans about creation groaning in labor pains, struggling now, in the present to become something new. Developmental psychologists tell us that it's from age fourteen to twenty-two that a person develops their mature sense of identity. That's knowing who you are, aside from, above and beyond simply being your parents' child. Learning who you are, growing into who you are and cultivating who you want to be - these are a trinity of developmental processes. They are inseparable from one another. Combined, it's an undertaking that our confirmands are just beginning now. Can we take a moment to consider the awe-inspiring process they are starting?

As for the future, you heard Samantha Myers read from the Gospel According to John where Jesus tells his followers of what is to come. He speaks of the advocate whom he will guide us into all of the truth. Every Confirmation Sunday, as a congregation we promise our friendship and prayers, our hopes and our labors, to grow together in God's love. Can we stop to hold faith in our savior's wonderful promise? The end result of all these labors, all these field trips, all these weekends, all of these Sundays in church is that He will be in the Father, that we will be in Him, and that He will be in us.

One last set of three. This is the trinity that each confirmand represents within themselves. These are regular kids, coping with pressures they've never faced before. At the very same time, they are amazing, awe-inspiring wonders. And, inseparably from the other two, even if they have only started to firm up the details, they are each uniquely and irreplaceably themselves. Let's salute them all.

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