

Countless Confirmations

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When I was 14 years old, I was confirmed as a member of Zion Lutheran Church in Canton, Ohio. This took place after I had completed 3 years of Saturday morning classes, which included memorizing the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and Martin Luther's Catechism - which explains those things *and* the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. [That's right, you lucky students!] But here's the thing: In spite of firmly affirming my faith; armed with all that solid theological information, by the time I got to college, I found that my faith was beginning to *flounder*. Fortunately, I had some good friends who helped me pull the pieces back together; and I once again confirmed my faith, and felt affirmed by God - so affirmed, that the pathway to becoming a pastor opened-up before me. Unfortunately, several years later, when I "came out" that pastoral path went "poof"; and I was once again wandering in a spiritual wilderness. Fortunately for me, in that wilderness - like a *Godsend* - I found a new church and new friends who re-affirmed me and helped me heal and move faithfully forward.

The point is, Life and Faith are far too complex for *any* of us to say, "I've got it! I have arrived!" Now we can and we *do* have stretches of time when every thing seems to fall into place, and our path ahead looks perfectly clear and steady; but that doesn't mean that things can't take a sudden or dangerous turn. For example, on that first Palm Sunday, it looks like Jesus has it made. The happy crowds are waving their palm branches and shouting their hosannas. However, five days later, those same hostile crowds are shaking their fists and shouting "crucify him!" By Good Friday, it appears as if Jesus' message of inclusive love, his mission of restoring fractured relationships and healing broken lives, has hit a literal *dead* end. Yet as Easter morning reveals, this is not the case. The story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection affirms that even when you and I face the most deadly of dangers, our Divine Source will see us safely through that danger and darkness - into the light of a new and glorious day.

Perhaps the most important thing for you Confirmation students - and for all of us - to remember on this day, is that though our own faith and personal resolve may waver or even fall apart, the Divine Love and Grace that we see in Jesus Christ remains constant and sure. So while we are delighted that you have affirmed your faith today, our greatest joy is that the Holy One has affirmed - and will continue to affirm - your unique and beautiful selves, every day of your lives!

In my pastoral and personal experience, I've come to recognize that *Confirmation* is truly a lifelong *process*. The way we envision our Divine Source - and our connection to that Source - during our teen years, will likely [and hopefully] change in our twenties or forties, sixties or eighties. The Living, Still-Speaking Source of the Cosmos is so grand and glorious that it takes an entire lifetime [and beyond] to begin to comprehend and appreciate. Yet there is One Divine Truth that you and I can hold-onto throughout our entire Life's journey. And that is, that *God is Love!* God is Love! So no matter where our lives take us, this Loving Source from whom we all come will always be a living part of

each of us, and all of us. One reason I know this, it that I have clearly seen and experienced that Divine compassion and graciousness in the hearts and lives of so many of you.

The crucial thing I that I want to convey to our students - and to everyone here today - is that you never have to face Life's difficulties or dangers alone. In times of darkness or doubt, remember this day. Remember this wonderful gathering of Faith, Hope and Love. And remember that there is always a place of support and care for you - in this community, in the wider Church, and in the welcoming embrace of the Holy One who creates you, truly knows you, and completely loves you.