

John 15:9-17

**A Faith of Our Own©
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Dr. Sharlyn Gates

There was a humorous email that came my way recently. A young couple took their 2 little sons to church. The baby was baptized that day while the 4 year old was intent on watching and listening to everything.

On the way home, the 4 old year started crying. His mother asked him why – what was wrong?

He answered through his sobs – “that preacher said every child should be raised in a Christian home, but I’d rather stay with you and Daddy!”

Today is such a special day! A few years ago, in different places and at different times, each of our four young people who are being confirmed today were brought to the waters of baptism.

We say that baptism is an outward, visible sign of an inward, invisible grace. In baptism, God is doing the important work of claiming us, sealing us – that is putting his invisible stamp on us as God’s own people.

So, sometime after Rebecca, and Allison and Anderson, and Mackenzie were born, their parents and grandparents and other family members gathered around to witness their precious child being baptized into the family of God.

And at that baptismal font, parents, or grandparents – someone stood there and answered the questions that profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and they made a promise to raise their child in a Christian home, with the help and support of the church. They answered the same questions for themselves and their child that these young Confirmand’s will answer on their own today.

The parents “stood in” for the children until the children reached the age where they could choose to claim that faith for themselves.

I have had the greatest pleasure in working with and watching these youth grow and wrestle with what they believe. While the curriculum we used was fun and comprehensive, they took this time so seriously, and they wrote statements of faith with much thought and care.

We had lots of laughs, but also some tears and struggles with trying to sort it all out. At our retreat in January, we stayed up too late, ate way too much junk, played games and laughed – AND – we had some mountaintop experiences with the living Lord in some very special moments of prayer and meditation.

Today, it all comes together, and they will come and gather around the font – maybe not the same font where they were baptized – maybe it’s not even the same sanctuary or the same congregation – but it was The Font in Christ’s Church, and wherever we are – the congregation witnesses and speaks for the entire universal church.

In fact, at baptism, the congregation makes a commitment, just as the parents do, to participate in nurturing the child in faith. And that congregation is speaking –standing in – for the church, wherever that young person goes.

I want to commend you, as a congregation, for fulfilling your baptismal vows, for taking seriously that responsibility to provide learning and growing opportunities – like Sunday School and Bible School and child-friendly worship – and safe nurseries for our smallest children.

You’ve done a good job of keeping that promise, as have the parents of these youth. I was very impressed with the level of knowledge these young people already had before we even began.

Today, Mackenzie Nash, Rebecca Cook, Allison Muenzer and Anderson Muenzer will come up here and will read to you their carefully written statements that say what they believe, and they will stand here at the font and claim a faith of their own.

I made it very clear from the beginning that this was about their choice. They don’t come to this day just because we adults expect them to, or even because we really hope they will. They have to decide for themselves if this profession of faith they make is authentic, if they are ready to do it.

And they have. What a moment it is in the life of a family and in the life of a congregation! It is a milestone in the lives of these young people. Confirmation is a day to remember and to look back on with joy, celebrating the faith that continues on from generation to generation. What a perfect Mother’s Day gift for mothers who made the promise at their child’s baptism that they would do their best to teach them the faith!

But where do we go from here? Our prayer is that each of these young people who are professing faith in Christ today will let this time be a beginning of a new and more mature journey with God – for a lifetime. They are not only professing faith but they are also becoming full, active members of this church. They are not the church of tomorrow – they are the church today, as much as any of us who are older and who have been around a lot longer.

I think that their continued commitment to the church and to Christ have as much to do with the rest of as it does with them. While they have a responsibility to set priorities and to be here and participate in the life of the church, to keep learning and growing and praying – just as we all do, of course – we have a responsibility to treat them as

equal members of the church, to listen to and value their ideas that might be different from how we've always done things.

These new, active members are eligible for ordination as elders (and deacons, if we had them here). They are bright and capable of teaching children and leading events and serving on committees. Of course, with school and their continued growth they are somewhat limited in time. But our valuing them as members is an important factor in how dedicated they will be.

Last week we heard Jesus, in the Gospel of John, say that he is the Vine and that we are the branches, and that God, the Father, is the Grower, or the Gardener. He said that bearing fruit is what we are about as the Church – as his disciples. That fruit is love – love for him and love for one another. Jesus said that we, the Church, the branches have to stay connected to him, the Vine because if we separate ourselves from him we can do nothing.

This week's text continues that same theme and it is a good word for us as we think about what it means for professing faith in Christ, for committing ourselves as members of His church, of being and making disciples. Here is what Jesus says in John 15:9-17, reading this morning from the translation of The Message:

⁹⁻¹⁰"I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done—kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love.

¹¹⁻¹⁵"I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. You are my friends when you do the things I command you. I'm no longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father.

¹⁶"You didn't choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won't spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, he gives you.

¹⁷"But remember the root command: Love one another.

Here is good wisdom for anyone who claims to be a Christ follower – be obedient to the command Jesus gives us. That command is fairly simple, really. Love one another the way Christ has loved us. And what way is that?

It is putting your life on the line, giving yourself in love, putting yourself out so that someone can have more, taking risks with your reputation perhaps to stand with

someone who is hurting. It is going the extra mile, reaching out, standing up for, sharing about our faith, respecting and honoring others – and also respecting and loving ourselves – that is, taking care of the self God loves so much.

Ultimately, Jesus wants us to be fruit bearers for him. He says when we follow his command to love we are bearing fruit.

And as much as we talk about the choice to believe or not believe – we have to also look at what Jesus said about choice.

“You did not choose me,” he said. “I choose you. And I put you in the world to bear fruit.”

We can choose to answer or to ignore – but Jesus was first in the choosing. We are chosen by God through Jesus, the Son, to belong to him. We are given the wonderful, joyful gift of being a part of the family of God and of sharing that gift so that it spreads out more and more.

Jesus calls us his friends if we do as he commands. He says he has told us everything he knows from the Father – we are part of the insiders – friends of Christ!

Our call as the Church – as his friends – is to love, to show his love to all. Jesus said, “I’ve told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature.”

Today we celebrate with our new young members and their families as they profess the faith that has become their own – a faith that will continue to grow and develop – that will challenge them at times, comfort them in sadness, and be a great source of joy.

May we not only be a model for them but also look to them for vision and for our own growth – that all of us might bear fruit for Christ.

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