

Called by Christ
Confirmation Sunday
May 20, 2007

Ephesians 1:15-23

What a wonderful day. I mean really, aside from the weather, could today be any more perfect? Today we have ten young people who want to join this congregation, ten young people who (even after spending countless hours with me, listening to me blather on about our church, the church, about Jesus, and God and the Holy Spirit, about the Bible, about prayer, about service and mission) still want to affirm their baptisms. They want to stand up, in front of all you people and say, yes I'm ready to be part of this congregation, and I'm willing to be a part of this congregation.

Today's scripture reading speaks to the very . . . (Cell phone rings) It's a number I don't recognize, I better take this. Hello, yes well I'm kinda busy. Oh its you (It's God on the phone I'm gonna have to take this). Fine yes, how have you been? . . . Really? Oh I'm sorry to hear that. Yes, well that *is* good news. Yes I'd be happy to jot a few things down, hold on one minute while I find a pen . . . Uh-huh, Okay, sorry say that again. . . preach and teach the gospel . . . ministries of reconciliation and renewal . . . Okay, great, I think I got it. Uh-huh, you too. Yes I want to see you soon too, but not too soon. Okay. Bye.

Sorry about that, God was just calling to tell me with the eyes of my heart enlightened, what is the hope to which God has called me, and what the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us who believe. And I have to tell you that was a nice call to get, because up until today, I've had a hard time figuring out what all of these things were.

The fact is that few of us get a call from God whereby everything we are called to do as Christians is laid out for us. In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus (which by the way, was best as we can tell, not exactly a town full of do-gooders) Paul thanks God for the people's faith and love. He then goes on to say that he prays that the God will give the people a spirit of wisdom and revelation as they come to know God.

One of the things I particularly like about today's passage is that it describes the process of getting to know God over time. Specifically Paul writes, "May God give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God." As you come to know God. As you come to know God, you'll know more and more about the hope to which God has called you. As I told the confirmands during our classes, you don't have to have it all figured out in order to join the church, you only need to be willing to go on a journey with God, you only need to desire to follow Jesus more closely, you only need to be open to the movements of the holy Spirit, and you need to allow God the time and place in your life (which includes but is certainly not limited to Sundays) so that you can get to know God over time.

Our church, that is the First Church of Christ in Longmeadow, comes out of a tradition whereby we believe in the ongoing and continuing revelation of God. So yes, God's word is contained in the 66 books of the Old and New Testament, but it does not stop there. We believe that God is still speaking, and while God may not be calling up on our cell phones, or text-messaging us during class or at work, there *are* ways and means by which we can hear God's voice, whereby we can discern God's call for our lives. Listening for what God might be saying to you, and then acting upon what you hear is at the very center of what it means to be a part of this specific congregation and also the

United Church of Christ, the denomination to which this church belongs. Have any of you here in church today ever read the preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ? If you have please raise your hands. The confirmands who were at our last class can all raise their hands, because this was what we devoted the bulk of our last class on. I won't read the whole thing to you, but I will read a snippet, just to give you a sense about the kind of forethought our ancestors in faith had way back in 1957 when the denomination was formed. It reads: "[The United Church of Christ] claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers. It affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God."¹ Let me say that again: It is the responsibility of the church in each generation to make the historic faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God.

Nothing drives me crazier than when people describe children and youth as the future of the church. I assure I do not do what I do with youth so that someday, somewhere off in the future, I'll be able to sit in a pew somewhere where these youth will be running the church. I do not take youth on mission trips, or away on retreat, so that someday they'll learn to be servants of God's people and disciples of Christ. Our youth are not the future of the church; they are the present of the church. Like each of us, our youth each have their own gifts and talents which can be used today in the service of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We've seen in our own congregation young people living out their calls to be servants of the gospel:

¹ Paragraph 2 of the Preamble to the "Constitution of the United Church of Christ" as found at <http://www.ucc.org/aboutus/constitution.htm>

We've had young people bring friends to church

We've had young people offer prayers in church

We've had young people reading scripture during worship

We have young people volunteering as shepherds for the Sunday school program.

In June, we are taking 25 young people to Baltimore, not because they are the future of the church, but because they have heard God's call to them and know they can respond today. The work and service we did in Boston during our Confirmation trip was not preparation for some future opportunity to serve as part of God's healing and reconciliation of the world. The people we fed at Loaves and Fishes in Springfield, were really served that day. The conversations we had with people currently and formerly living on the streets of Boston, were really served by telling their stories and know that that you heard them, and that you saw them, and that perhaps when you encountered a person in the future who was begging for change, or sleeping in a doorway, you might not be so quick to judge them, that you might see them as a child of God, that even if you didn't give them any money, you could give them a smile and dignify their presence. The prayers we prayed together were real prayers, the conversations we had were real theology, and the questions we asked were part of really trying to make the historic faith our own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and purity of heart before God. You have not *learned* what it means to be Christians, you have *practiced* what it means to be Christians.

Today these ten youth have taken a bold step in affirming their commitment and their desire to be part of God's church in the future, but also to be part of God's church in the present. Like all of us, they are seeking avenues to express their faith in ways that

make sense to them. I wish to say to our Confirmands now, what Paul wrote in the letter to the Ephesians, "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers." Christ is calling each us to mission and ministry. God is still speaking as the revelation of God's holy will moves forward, and the Holy Spirit is indeed at work, working as an advocate and stirring us to move in new directions and new dimensions. God is calling us, and giving us a spirit of wisdom and revelation as we grow in relationship. We need not know all the answers to be a faithful Christians, we need only to know that we cannot find the answers on our own. We need God's Word, we need the insights of those who've come before, and we need a community who come together regularly for worship, and study and prayer, that together we might discern the hope to which we've been called. Amen.