

October 26, 2014 Reformation Sunday, Confirmation
Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church
Romans 3:19-28, John 8:31-36

Affirmation

This last week I was visiting with one of our members who is 93 years old. She remembered back to when she first became part of this congregation. Her family started coming to IPLC when she was at the age at which you begin Confirmation. She remembered how back then they separated the boys and girls. She remembered who taught the classes, the stern pastor and the dedicated, gifted teachers and parents. She remembered how the classes were held early on Saturday mornings.

Our current students also have been known to note that early Saturday morning meeting time. Class of 2014, just think, you too can remember those early mornings in the year 2094.

What is Confirmation? We asked the students last Saturday morning as we were looking ahead to this Sunday morning. One of the students wrote: “To me, Confirmation is standing firm about your belief.” Another: “Basically, it means we say for our self that we choose our religion.” Another: “Confirmation means graduating into getting more freedom in the religious compartment.” Another: “Donuts.”

All those answers get at some of what Confirmation is about. It’s about standing firm, about making affirmation, about saying for yourself. It’s about freedom—a special kind of freedom, a freedom that is particular to the “religious compartment.”

Martin Luther wrote about that freedom. He called it “The Freedom of a Christian.” The freedom of a Christian is a particular and paradoxical freedom, for it comes when you recognize you are totally dependent on God, totally dependent on grace. Paradoxically, that dependency is freeing. We are free to do things, say things, because of what God does for us, because of what God says to us. It’s the freedom to respond to grace.

Today we remember and celebrate that. Today we remember more than 80 years ago, almost 500 years ago, we remember and celebrate the reforming Spirit that swept through the church, swept through a work-crazed monk named Martin Luther. Luther was surrounded by voices telling him what to do, voices telling him about the work had had to do, voices that Luther called demonic. But the Spirit was also speaking to Luther, speaking through the Bible, speaking through this passage from Romans. Luther heard this, and felt a freedom, felt a liberating experience of grace. It swept through him, poured over him, and in him, enabling him to stand firm and affirm, “This is what I believe. This what God is doing. This is what religions is.”

What Luther learned and shared and wrote and taught still forms a framework for what we do in this particular church, in particular for what we do in Confirmation. Like Luther, we read the Bible, we study the Apostles Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sacraments, the 10 Commandments, what they say and mean. Learning more about them is part of what Confirmation is.

But Confirmation is about more than that. It’s about donuts. Sweetened dough is, at essence, an encouragement, even an enticement, on an early Saturday morning. But donuts do more than add a sugar rush. Donuts stand for and affirm something else that Confirmation is about—community. Our students here don’t all go to the same school, don’t all live in the same neighborhood. As we discussed last week, you wouldn’t know one another in the way that you

do, you wouldn't know the teachers or your pastor like you do, but that you are a part of this congregation, this Confirmation class, this time of intentional study and community.

But Confirmation is about more than that. If it were just about fellowship, or just about acquiring information, we would miss the essence of Confirmation, the heart of the Reformation. Today is about the Spirit's work in us, the grace that sweeps through us, pours over and in us, the grace upon which we stand, the grace that affirms it is not what you do, but what God does and is doing that makes you free indeed.

Five hundred years ago the church needed to hear that, needed to be reminded of that.

We still need to hear that; we still need to be reminded of that—that baptismal truth.

Confirmands of 2014, our 9th graders, just beginning high school, you are at an age in which so many voices are talking about the work you do; you have a lot of people telling you what to do. (Maybe sometimes Confirmation was someone telling you something you had to do.) You are surrounded by voices that measure you by what you do, by the work you do. You take state and national tests, get papers back in school with a score at the top. Your parents can probably check your standing at any given moment online. There's the input of the social media. There's the measurements of movies and magazines. All these voices, some of them demonic, telling you that what you are is the work you do, and that you can never do enough.

There is another voice, the voice that spoke at your baptism, firmly announcing that God's grace sets you free. Confirmation is about listening to that voice, affirming that truth. Remember that.