

7th Sunday after Easter, May 8, 2016 – Confirmation Sunday
Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church
John 17:20-26

Special Verses

It's a special day for Franklin and Geah, this day of their confirmation, this day they affirm the promises made at their baptisms. Franklin and Geah chose special Bible verses to mark this day and the affirmations of faith they will make. When they each told me which verses they chose they chose and why I thought how fitting they were, how especially fitting for each child.

You can see these verses on the cover of today's bulletin. Franklin chose the verse from Proverbs, a verse that counsels brevity of speech and coolness of head as signs of knowledge and understanding. This is so fitting for Franklin. Franklin is polite and to the point, astute beyond a mere measure of age. This verse is Franklin—even down to the cadences of how he speaks. When I asked him why he chose this verse, his explanation was itself proverbial, wasted not a word: he likes Proverbs, they make good sense.

Geah chose the verses from Romans, which are a bit longer. They're longer because they list the many things, the many situations, the many challenges in our experience, in our environment, in everything. Even this exhaustive list exhausts itself, ultimately ends with "nor anything else in all creation." These verses speak of what we cannot know—and what we know; they express the inexpressible situations we can find ourselves in—and what we can count on when we do. In her wise way, Geah explained: "There are times in life that can be really tough, but this reminds me I'm not alone, it's not all up to me, God is with me." How fitting this verse is for Geah, who is an encourager. How fitting that she claim a verse of God's encouragement, a verse that affirms that in all our experiences, in all times and places, always, unfailingly, ultimately, God's love is with us. Nothing can separate us from it.

These are two special children—let me correct that, as you have heard and can see, they're no longer children, they are emerging adults. Today, this day of their confirmation, they affirm the faith in which they've been raised, claiming it as their own as they continue to grow up and grow in it. It's a special day for them. And, of course, it's a special day for mothers—for their mothers, who have done so much to raise them in faith—and for all who are mothers here, all mothers in faith. Mothering being more than reproduction or adoption, mothering being a function and expression of faith, mothering as something we all participate in when we are part of a church. All who are teachers—in Sunday School and Confirmation and Adult Bible Study, all who are nurturers—including the nurture of worship, all who sing or assist or usher or greet. All who make this place welcoming and safe—including our Property Team, which is not all that feminine but which does the ministry of mothering in faith by making these holy spaces a home.

On this day it is fitting that we note that the traditional imagery of the church is as mother: mother church. It's a fitting metaphor for this day, fitting for this Confirmation day, for the goal of mothering is that the child grows up, is able to function, survive, thrive, on their own—and for more than just their own: on behalf of others, too.

So it is we end with a final, special and fitting verse, a gospel verse, a motherly verse from the lips of Jesus. Today's gospel reading is a prayer by Jesus that we get to overhear. We hear Jesus pray for his disciples—for us—and not just for us, for others who will believe because of us. Jesus prays: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one." Jesus prays that we grow up in our faith, that we become one with him, that through us others may have knowledge and understanding, may have the conviction, the unfailing encouragement of baptism: nothing can separate us from the love of God.