

Alive in Love – Acts 2:1-21

May 20, 2018

Please pray with me. Holy Spirit, blow through our hearts, our churches, and our communities with your all-consuming power. Help us speak the language of love not just with our lips, but with our lives. Amen.

Today is an exciting day for us. It is both Pentecost Sunday and we are confirming two young people who have worked diligently over the space of about fifteen months to learn more about the Bible and its meaning and about our United Church of Christ history and polity as well as the history of our own Tory Hill Meetinghouse.

Pentecost is the day when the church comes alive with “the rush of a violent wind,” with preaching and prophecies, with people from all nations hearing and understanding the good news. Today, we grasp the gospel torch trusting the Spirit to lead our church to new life as evidenced by the confirmation service to come.

Let me ask, what is confirmation to you? How would you explain to a friend if they asked you “what is confirmation all about”? A typical answer would be something like this: you complete a year-long class and you get confirmed on Pentecost Sunday and you become a full member of the United Church of Christ. Let me tell you. Confirmation is much more than that.

I looked up the word ‘to confirm’ in the dictionary. This is what I found: the word “confirm” is originated from a Latin word “confirmare” which has two parts: con—(together) and firmare—(to strengthen). Therefore, ‘to confirm’ means ‘to strengthen together.’ So, in the context of Church, ‘to confirm’ means ‘to strengthen together someone’s (typically youth) faith and practice.’

Interestingly, Graci's mother, Kelley, is a former deacon here at Tory Hill and Daniel's dad, John, is currently chair of our board of deacons. Both Graci and Daniel expressed a desire to be deacons which led to the formation of our confirmation class so that they could join the church and be deacons. During the year they have served as junior deacons and have become more comfortable taking part in our services. During the classes we discussed different ways of being Jesus's hands and feet in this world, how we can help our community; the many aspects of Christianity and how important it is to be part of a faith community – a faith family for strength and support. Sadly, that is not the reality in America today. Statistics show that confirmands soon drop out of the church and don't come back until they are married and have their own children if they do actually return to church. So, I urge us to remember that Confirmation Sunday is not the end, just as Commencement is not the end of learning, but rather passage into another stage of life and a wonderful journey forward.

Yesterday morning I spotted an article in the "Reflections" section of the Portland Press Herald written by Susan Lebel Young, a regular contributor. She spoke of her Catholic upbringing, her mother's Aunt Rebecca, a sister of the Presentation of Mary who was a frequent visitor, parochial school, a structured family evening meal, and how, one night she told Aunt Rebecca her secret. She was engaged to her Jewish boyfriend. Aunt Rebecca twisted the gold band on her left finger and said, referring to her being wed to Christ. "I too married a Jew." Ms. Young stated, "When I recall full-of-grace Mary, full-of-mischief Aunt Rebecca and all those full-of-blessings rosaries I said, I feel grounded spiritually. The sacred in

us, the rituals we play out every day, make a difference. We may leave them, but in some fundamental way, like memories of yesteryears' dinners, they don't leave us." And so, I encourage you to embrace the spiritual rituals of your youth, hold them close to you because one day they may just be the support you need to carry on.

Remember the 'together' part? In this faith journey, no one travels alone. We go together. In fact, God assigns to us four travel partners: family, friends, Church, and God Himself. Families sometimes can discourage us. Friends at other times can abandon us. Even the church can disappoint us as well. However, we do have one partner, eternal and divine, who never abandons or forsakes us. He is God. He is with us forever. He is our faithful partner in our journey to Heaven and He will carry out His work in us until we are transformed into Christ's image. We can trust in Him. You see, our final destination in our journey is Heaven. Heaven is not a physical place, but rather Heaven is a place where God is. We are going to this place where God is and we will be with Him in His presence for eternity.

So, Daniel and Grace, you are taking your first step in your Heaven-bound journey. Your family, friends, Church, and God are journeying with you. You do have the right tools—the Bible and the Holy Spirit that will guide you in the right paths and help you stay on the course. May God be with you in your journey. Amen.