

My sermon today is actually a letter which I've written to the confirmands and will read out loud to them now, though the rest of you are all welcome to listen in.

Dear Sara, Tae, and Jaxon:

About three years ago you started meeting with Penny Magelssen and me for confirmation classes on Sunday mornings in my office. We were studying the Old and New Testament, Martin Luther's Small Catechism, and what it means to live as a Lutheran. About halfway through your two years of classes, the world shut down because of Covid. Just like your school went online, so did confirmation, and we met on Zoom for the last half of 2020 and pretty much all of 2021.

I am certain that none of us liked doing confirmation on Zoom, and I know that whether in person or online you were often bored and you complained about having to go to class every Sunday (at least that's what I heard from a certain confirmand who shall remain nameless 😊). I think I shared with you that I even remember feeling like that when I was in confirmation in middle school and that really the only thing I still consciously remember about confirmation was that sometimes we ate donuts.

But there's something that happens in confirmation whether you are conscious about it or not—I know, because it happened to me. In confirmation you were presented with the skeleton upon which to hang your life of faith. We built up some bones by studying scripture. We added flesh with the words from Martin Luther about the creed, the Lord's Prayer, the 10 Commandments, and the sacraments. We added features of what it means to live a life that follows Jesus through a Lutheran lens. You might not have known or thought about the fact that what we were doing is building up some life infrastructure, but down the road, you might realize, like I did, that the skeleton of faith you've experienced here is the grounding for the rest of your life.

One of the most beautiful things I've learned about each of you is how none of you take things at face value. Each of you is wicked smart and will question and challenge what you learn, and even who is teaching you. I found each of you to be truthful about your questions and doubts, and you wondered if you could authentically make the five promises of confirmation that you've talked about with your mentor:

to live among God's faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

What I believe and trust is that you will live out these promises, but it will be in your own unique and authentic way. You won't do so because your mom is making you or your pastor is expecting you, and the path you take may look different than the one many of us took. But what I've seen in each of you is a core faith that even when it's the size of a mustard seed keeps pulling you toward a deeper knowing, a deeper trust in the God who made you, redeemed you, and accompanies you.

And I hope you find it comforting that in the end, faith isn't even up to you, but rather it's a gift of the Holy Spirit. I wonder if you remember when we studied Martin Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the creed:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Luther asks, *What is this? Or what does this mean?*

And he answers, "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy, and kept me in the true faith."

The Holy Spirit who sealed you at your baptism is the one who will continue to call and enlighten and sanctify and keep you. The Holy Spirit will remind you of the ways of Jesus. You are not doing this journey by yourself. The Holy Spirit works through all the people who are surrounding you today, all these people who are praying for you, all these people who signed your stoles.

When a pastor receives a stole when they are ordained, it is a symbol of being set apart for a certain calling. Today when we place this stole on you, you are being called and set apart to live a life of faith that is your own. You are affirming your baptism to declare that the journey is now yours. Your stole says you are righteous, but it's not because of what you do but rather because of who you are—a beloved child of God. You are being set apart to walk in the way of Jesus, a way that will bring you more life and joy and grace than any other way you could walk.

And there's another perk that comes with confirmation—now you can even vote in congregational meetings!

Jaxon, Sara, and Tae, I am proud of who God has made you to be. And I promise to pray alongside you as you journey to remind you of Jesus' promise: "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." Congratulations on your confirmation. Amen.