

“What we know and what we don’t know...”
Sermon on Pentecostal Sunday, June 5, 2022

Dear church,

Last Wednesday, when we had our final gathering of the season, I said to our confirmation class (right before they started playing manhunt!) that two things in life and faith are supremely important: an awareness of what we know and an appreciation for what we don’t know. That sounds simple enough, but fact is that sometimes we presume to know things that we can’t know much about, and it often leads to prejudice and narrow mindedness. At other times we are frightened by the unknown and God says to us, “Don’t be scared. I’m with you. Right here, when you don’t know your next step, the life of faith begins!” In fact, faith is life lived to the fullest with what we know and what we don’t know!

Some people feel that two years of confirmation classes is a long time. It is in fact very short, and for the four young people who are being confirmed today, it was even shorter. Much of it took place via screen, on zoom. Sometimes the camera didn’t work. Sometimes the audio system gave us fits or the Internet connection was weak. Sometimes Brody joined us from the car on his way back from wrestling practice, falling in and out of the picture. Things were definitely not perfect. Through it all, Mrs. B. and I attempted to teach, to share what we know about God in our Christian tradition: the concept of grace, the importance of faith, the Golden Rule, God’s love for justice... We prayed the Lord’s Prayer together. We walked through the big narratives of the Bible: Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus himself. There are many things we want our young people to know so that they can navigate Scripture and put the readings and messages that we hear every Sunday into their given context. At the end of every confirmation class though, I’m painfully aware, that we have only scratched the surface of the Christian faith and rarely reached the depth of its powerful roots. And that’s why, what we don’t know yet, is equally, if not more important than all the knowledge about the Bible that we teach and preach in this church. I stand here as a pastor, and I will be the first one to say, “What do I know?” The answer is: not nearly enough!

Enter the Holy Spirit. Enter the Feast of Pentecost, which we celebrate today, the birthday of the church. This Feast is about all the things we don't know yet. Jesus, before he departed, said to his disciples, "Remember all the things I taught you, the commandments, the teachings, the time when you argued on the road..." And then he said, "The Spirit of God will remind you of my teachings, and more than that, the spirit will teach you ALL things. Which means... even after three years of fulltime confirmation classes without room and board, our Lord said to the original disciples, Peter, James, John and the others, "Guess what? You aren't nearly finished with your spiritual education!" And trust me, even those of us who are in the seventh decade of life or in the eighth or ninth, still have things to learn. Enter the Holy Spirit. Enter the Feast of Pentecost. On Pentecost, God places the emphasis on all the things we don't know yet and says, "Trust in this invisible guide I'm giving you."

The insights that we receive over the course of a life time, the way we read and understand scripture, how it forms us as people, how it humbles and changes us, how it brings us in touch with the love of God and the depth of truth, how it builds us up when we are down, how it makes us listen to the music of faith, all of that and much more is the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is a reason why the church began after Jesus was gone from sight and not a single day before that. The initiation of the church began when the apostles moved from what they knew to what they did not know yet, from the safety they experienced in the company of Jesus to the adventure of figuring out the life of faith by practicing it. And because of that, among other reasons, I hate to compare confirmation with the graduation ceremonies that take place in our schools this time of year. The four young people who receive their blessings today are not graduating, they are being initiated into the life of faith, and there is a big difference between the two. You may check off your school education. But you can't check off God. It's not possible. God is your life giver and love giver, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. You can't check God off, just like you can't choose to stop breathing without dying. On this day, your life of faith begins. Make the most of it and embrace the teaching points that will come your way. The Holy

Spirit will guide you even better than Mrs. B. and I ever could. The Holy Spirit will guide you even better than the navigation systems we have in our cars these days. Because the Holy Spirit knows roads that are not even on your official map yet. Trust him. Trust her. She is trustworthy, that Spirit Jesus has promised us, the Spirit of life and truth and godliness. She is a wonderful guide in all matters that we don't know yet, which is a lot!

Amen.