



"Can You Be Different?"

Romans 12:9-21
 The Seventh Sunday of Easter
 Confirmation Sunday
 May 4, 2008

Nineteen new members on a single day. New members. Not recycled United Methodists or disgruntled Baptists or those "predestined to be Methodists" Presbyterians, but **NEW** members. Where is the press? The television cameras? A sign should be hung out on Irby Street. This is what we live for isn't it?

And it is so rare in mainline churches. A Bishop friend of mine wrote recently that over the last two years half of the churches in his annual conference failed to make **ONE** new Christian. Six hundred or so churches over a period of two years didn't even make one new Christian. And here we have 19 today.

Have we forgotten what all this means? Taken it for granted? I went to Google and typed in the words "confirmation class" to see what would turn up. I found a rather typical call to confirmation from a church pastor. He wrote:

"Confirmation Class begins each year in the Fall and concludes on Palm Sunday. Confirmation class is offered for eighth and ninth graders and for older teens who have not yet completed confirmation. The class will meet each Sunday morning during the Sunday School hour and will explore the Christian faith. Confirmation, however, is no small step. It is an adult faith decision and requires mature commitment. Students will be expected to complete all written work and memorize passages of Scripture as well as the creeds. Parents, if you desire your young person to participate in this class, please contact Rev. Brown."

With an invitation as inspiring as that, we would be surprised, wouldn't we, if anyone bothered to contact Rev. Brown.

But every year our young shows up for the first class, persevere to the end, do pretty much everything we ask of them, and then they are confirmed in a service like this one.

As scripture puts it, "Behold, I tell you a mystery." I am glad for it, but I do not understand it.

In my research on confirmation classes I came across a blog written by someone who claims to have been confirmed some years ago in the Episcopal Church. He wrote that the only thing he remembers about his confirmation class, after all these years, is learning that when you scramble the letters of the word "Episcopal," you get Pepsi-Cola. (I also learned that if you scramble the letters of the word, "Presbyterians," you get Britney Spears. I don't know what United Methodist will get you.)

I want so badly for this day, for this milestone in your lives, to mean much more for you than that. For all of us this is a day of great joy.

You are doing something today that not many other people are doing. There is no pressure to do this—well maybe your parents have put a little pressure on you-- but there is no pressure from the culture for you to take this step.

What you are doing—and this is the really good news about today—is countercultural. You are taking a stand. You are committing your lives to a cause and a way of life that may be unpopular but is always life-giving. Bless you for that.

Today is good practice for what is to come. Beginning today you are going to have to **be** different, **act** differently, and **think** differently. Today you are committing yourself to follow Jesus Christ with your lives. And to do that you are going to need the courage of your convictions.

Can you be different?

I want for you what Paul wants for you—followers who desire more than to just fit in, go with the flow. This world, this church, doesn't need more people who live and look and act like everyone else. We need people whose lives will more closely resemble the life of Christ.

Eugene Peterson translates a portion of what J.T. just read this way:

"Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath.
Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy;
share tears when they're down. Get along with each
other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies;
don't be the great somebody.

Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone....Don't
insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. 'I'll do
the judging,' says God. 'I'll take care of it.'

Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry,
go buy that person lunch, or if she's thirsty, get her a drink.

Your generosity will surprise her with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good." (The Message, Romans 12:14-21).

God bless you as you begin to live into this kind of life.

Amen.