

Confirmation: A Day For Decision Matthew 16:13-15

Today is Confirmation Sunday, a day that is part of a long Lutheran rite of passage if you will for young people growing in stature and faith. Some churches have pictures of confirmation classes on their walls that go back as many as 100 years. In fact, I have my father's confirmation class picture in black and white. I figure out it must be from the late 1930's or early 1940's.

It is normally a day filled with much honor. Many years ago it was common to have had an interview with the church elders. Then the confirmands were sitting in the front row of the congregation with white robes or new suits. It was a big family day, relatives would travel for miles to be with you. (in the 10:15 service show the confirmation photo of Grandma Eisberg from the 1890's)

Parents and sponsors, grandmothers and grandfathers all want to hear you answer the question that Jesus asked: "Who do you say that I am?"

It is not a new question. It was asked in the 1st century and now in the 21st century. As Jesus strolled around the temple during the festival of Dedication, Jewish leaders were asking, **"How long will you keep us in suspense? Are you the Messiah?"** John tells us the answers varied.

Some of the Jews thought Jesus was demon possessed and was raving mad. Others disagreed. (read John 10:19-20)

In an article from Christianity Today a journalist told about his hike in Galilee on the 40 mile path from Nazareth to Capernaum. Along the way he visited with Jews, Arab Christians, Muslims and asked what they thought about the man from Galilee. Many Arabs believed that Jesus walked on the water, raised Lazarus from the dead.

Christianity is one of many world religions. **But In the Lutheran church confirmation what makes a person a Christian?**

- a. Believe in the doctrine of the Trinity
- b. Believe that Jesus is God in flesh
- c. Believe and accept justification by faith
- d. Imitate Jesus

Luther's small catechism was a main portion of my confirmation program and memorized bible passages like: Colossians 1:15: **"Christ is the visible presence of the invisible God, the first born of all creation, by him all things were created."** Or Ephesians 2:8-9 **"for it is by grace that you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves it is a gift of God..."** or II Corinthians 5:21 **"God made (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."**

In his book Future Shock, Alvin Toffler explains how in this modern world of rapid change, confusion over choice, we all need a "stability zone" of regular habits, rituals, beliefs and a reference point that keeps us grounded.

We and our Confirmand who live in the 21st century are surrounded by **biotechnology: genetic engineering, artificial life, bionic medicine.**

Technology, nanotechnology are out running our theology and ethics.

Issues of abortion, genetic engineering, euthanasia, designer babies, corrective surgery on infants not yet born are all part of the biotechnology.

If you have a pace maker or a knee or hip replacement you are already part human and part machine.

We live in a pluralistic culture where many different religious voices clamor for our allegiance.

It is a culture that tells its children... "there is no truth".

Satan has managed to take truth out of the culture so that people now believe that one point of view is just as valid as another.... We have arrived back at Pilate's question to Jesus, **"What is truth?"**

In 2003 the "Da Vinci code" was written. Then this popular murder mystery novel was made into the movie: "The Da Vinci Code". It was written by Dan Brown. For those of you not familiar with this novel, the Da Vinci Code claims that Jesus was secretly married to Mary Magdalene. At the crucifixion of Jesus she was pregnant. The mystery novel relates how Mary Magdalene escaped to Gaul, modern day France. She gave birth to a daughter from whom descended ancient kings of France.

The existence of the blood line and descendants were kept secret until discovered by the Crusaders (1099) and then the Knights Templar were established to keep the secret and protect the blood line.

Jonathan Morris, a priest who writes a column for Fox News had this to say about the Da Vinci Code. **“Dan Brown is capable of passing fiction for fact....because Christians don’t know their faith, what and why they believe in Jesus. That is not Dan Brown’s fault.”**

This is the culture we are living in. This is the culture Nickolas and all young people are living in. And so, as parents, and grandparents we are rightly concerned **about their spiritual formation.**

In many was confirmation is starting line for the journey in the real world and adulthood. the most important thing to remember for the rest of our lives is that God is there and we need to believe and trust in Him. ...that sounds easy butthe devil is going to be tempting us in so many difficult and unique ways.

In this world culture, God is still seeking to connect to those who are drifting in a cultural sea of religious pluralism without a rudder. People want to know what gives life value.

God created every human being with a desire to be connected to Him. God is sending you and me. We live in this culture, but we are not going to be a **“gated community”, a “gated church”, isolated from the world.** God died for everyone. God loves everyone. God forgives anyone who is repented. God loves the sinner but hates the sin. And frankly that has been my understanding since seminary. Love the sinner hate the sin. Why because everyone of us sitting here today are sinners, you can figure the rest yourselves.

God is at work in the hearts and minds of our irreligious, non-Christian, unbelieving friends. You and I are the vessels God uses to communicate His love and to clarify His truth to people He cared enough to die for.

As disciples of Jesus we know that we have been reconciled, accepted by God. He is our friend. The bible tells us that God has justified us, he sees us just as if we had never sinned because of our faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross and rose from the grave. (Romans 5)

It is sincerely my prayer that you Nicholas understand that Christ died for you and God loves and forgives you all your sins, now and forever as you stay connected to the body of Christ through the church.

How can the unchurched, non believing, irreligious person know and experience this love of God? How can they hear about God’s love without someone telling them. Someone has to be sent. (Romans 10:14) We are sending today, we are sending Nickolas as our latest confirmand into the world where he will live work and play....so that the Holy Spirit can use him as well as you and me to lead others to Jesus.

Your parents, your grandparents encouraged you and worked with you in your study of God’s word so that someday your own grandchildren will look at your confirmation photo’s and say... that’s my grandmother, that my grandfather. **May God grant you the wisdom to pass on your faith in Jesus to the next generation.**