

John 20:19-31
Made Firm in Our Faith
Sunday April 23rd, 2017

A story is told of little Johnny who was present at the baptism of his little baby brother. All the way home after the baptism little Johnny cried and cried. His dad asked several times, "what was the matter?" Johnny finally replied. That pastor said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, but I want to stay with you guys....

It's important to know what type of family you are part of, isn't it. Through our baptism we all become part of the family of God. Our baptism is our adoption ritual, and our baptism certificate is our adoption paper. We as Christians are not born into the Church. We become part of the church through the adoption that occurs in Baptism.

Today is Confirmation Sunday here at Vista Church. It is time for all of us to reflect on our baptism and its connection to Confirmation. Many of you are Methodist and the concept of infant baptism and Confirmation is very natural, but I know also that many come from other denominations where infant baptism is not practiced as well as Confirmation. So for our life long Methodists and Confirmands this is a review, but is also a review for all of us.

Baptism is our initiation ritual into the Church. It is a sign that we have been claimed by God. It leaves an indelible mark just like a tattoo showing that we have claimed by God. It is not what we do in Baptism that matters; it is what God does. The form of baptism does not matter: whether we are dunked, poured or sprinkled. It matters that God claims us in that act. There is nothing that we can do to save ourselves. Salvation is totally a gift of God and there can almost be no better affirmation of that than the baptism of a baby.

A baby has no beliefs on its own. It can only receive what is gifted it in baptism and that is the salvation of its soul. In fact parents believe on behalf of an infant until the child reaches the age of accountability where it can take on the vows of belief on its own.

In our service when we come to baptizing and confirming our youth and bringing one of the adult parents of one of these youth into our church; I want you to note that the vows of belief are the same for baptism, confirmation and membership in the church.

When I did Confirmation Classes I always pointed this out that Confirmation was a time that we made firm our belief in Jesus Christ. I pointed this out about the word **“Confirm”**. That in Spanish the word **“con”** means with and you add to that **“firm”** than what you are doing is **“with firmness claiming your faith!”**

Young people who were baptized as babies, up to this time your parents were believing on your behalf. It is now time to take these vows on by yourselves and with firmness claim your faith in Jesus Christ. For those who are being baptized today, you are doing the same thing. With firmness you are deciding for yourselves to be Christians; and take on all the privileges and responsibilities of being believers in Jesus Christ.

This is your decision that you make today. This is a decision that all of us who are here today reaffirm as you take your vows, your promises to God.

Now belief in Jesus Christ is the fundamental issue to consider today. In our Gospel reading from John we see Thomas doubting the resurrection of Jesus on the day of his resurrection because he was missing from Church when Jesus showed up. The next Sunday evening he was present, saw Jesus and believed.

Today we are in the position of those whom Jesus addressed in verse 29, **“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”**

Indeed blessed are you today who have come to believe in Jesus Christ because of the example of family first and foremost, the teachings of the church, and your own education through the years, particularly for our confirmands, your studies over the last several months. You have come to believe, or deepened your belief, and claimed that belief for yourself.

Jesus in the Bible points out the importance of belief many times. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever BELIEVES in him will not perish but have everlasting life.”

Ephesian 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through FAITH, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” That is the amazing grace we sang about. That is the reminder that our faith is a gift and so the mode, the work we do in being baptized does not matter, but the gift of faith from God does.

In fact Jesus said the work we need to do to receive eternal life is to believe in Jesus. Jesus says in John 6:29, “This is the work of God, that you BELIEVE in him whom he has sent.”

Now on this Confirmation Sunday I want to let you know what you are doing is Biblical and very important for you and your life. As time goes on your faith will be challenged and you will have doubts and even wonder if you are saved and have eternal life in Jesus Christ. There are many negative voices in our society and world that grow ever shriller to destroy and take away the gift that you have even voices that come from within the Christian sphere.

When I was in College for a couple of years I hung around a group of people who were called Charismatic Christians. They practiced a particular gift called “speaking in tongues”. I didn’t speak in tongues, though, I and they prayed for that gift many times. Anyway they told me since I couldn’t do that I wasn’t saved and was going to hell.

Well as you can imagine that greatly disturbed me until I found this verse, Romans 10:9, “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and BELIEVE in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

I realized that many times I had confessed Jesus as Lord, one very important time being when I was confirmed, and I certainly believed that

God raised Jesus from the dead. I knew at that point, without a doubt, I was saved and quit hanging out with people that told me otherwise.

Today, as you take your Baptismal, Confirmation and Membership vows in a very formal way you will be doing what that one verse says to do in order to be saved. If you have never claimed it before or thought of it before, today is the day you can say without a doubt you are saved and have even been born again. So let's briefly look at these vows that help us know how to live once we have believed. These are the responsibilities that come with faith.

PRAYERS: This is a call to pray for the Church as a whole and Vista Church in particular. Pray for those within the church, particularly those on our Compassion Connection list. Pray for yourself. Pray for your friends and family and take some time in prayer to listen to God.

PRESENCE: This is a promise to God to be present in worship, Sunday School, youth group and other activities of the church. When you join a church you are indeed adopted into a family. Officially, in a few minutes you are about to have about 300 new Grandmas, Grandpas, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters. You will have people to rely on when life is hard and your faith is challenged. Think about this, Thomas doubted because he wasn't present when the church gathered together. He came to belief when he was present.

GIFTS: You have been given gifts of the Spirit, powerful gifts to forgive as Jesus said in our verses today. You have been gifted to build up the Body of Christ, the Church. And as time goes on these gifts will become more self-evident in your lives.

Part of gifts is also giving of your financial resources to the church. The goal of people of faith is 10% of our income. Now I know for most of you 10% of nothing is nothing, but one day you will have income and I encourage you to give of it from the very beginning. One youth who I confirmed many years ago is now in his 40s. He caught the vision of giving to God; so today at FUMC of Mesa there is an endowment for youth ministry in my name that he funded.

SERVICE: I am so proud that so many of you are already living out this promise to God. This last summer many of you went on a mission trip to Utah. Many of you are going to Agua Prieta on a mission trip this summer and you raised money at the Rodeo Sunday luncheon to put in a floor in a school in Agua Prieta. Some are helping with the coffee sales. Indeed you are living out this promise.

WITNESS: This for many people is very scary, because we have such a strange idea of what this means. Basically, it means, invite a friend to join with you in the activities of your faith: worship, Sunday School, youth group, service projects etc. It means finding People of Peace that I will talk about more in 2 weeks. This essentially means being a friend to have friends and invite them to meet Christ in the fellowship of other believers.

It means reading, just reading to know what's in there, what God is saying to you in the Bible. You are all getting the Bible that you've used through Confirmation that will help you in your faith and passing that faith on to others.

Verses 30 & 31 say, **“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.**

But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,

and that through believing you may have life in his name.” Times of doubt and the testing of your faith will come. The more you know of the Bible the better you will do to withstand these doubts and tests. And you will have life, abundant life in Jesus Christ in this world.

Indeed Confirmation is not the end of your Christian Education and service, but an important milestone in the walk of faith, the journey of faith in this life as the cover of our bulletin says, **“It is one step in a lifelong adventure of faith.”** I am honored to be with you in this moment and this time as you take this step of faith.

I want to say thanks for your parents for bringing you to this moment. I want to say thanks to Barbara and Shirley your Sunday School teachers for years. I want to say thanks to your sponsors and to

Valerie your Confirmation teacher. And thanks to you Vista Church for always making these young people feel welcome.

Let us join now in our sacrament of baptism and ritual of confirmation and membership. May all the confirmands, family members, and mentors come forward now.