

Choosing Community

Acts 2: 42-47

First United Church of Christ, Northfield, MN

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May God still speak through these words of scripture and sermon.

Every preacher hopes a sermon is memorable. The first sermon I preached among you was our initial service on Zoom in March 2020 and in it I told the story of my Confirmation experience as a preacher's kid. Using the third person voice, I shared the wrestling, the uncertainty, the guilt, the doubts, the tortured YES to a big question. Being confirmed was an angst filled moment for my teenage self. What I did not share in that sermon was how life-giving both that wrestling, and choice turned out to be.

That thirteen-year-old preacher's kid who was confirmed still exists within me today. Even now serving as a Pastor with a clear calling to be a leader among leaders in a congregation, I still have my doubts and wonderings. Could the church really be the way God wants to be visible in the world? Certainly, God could have come up with a better plan to ensure that each and every human being knows they are 100% a beloved child of God? But here we are, with the Spirit's help, leaning into that affirmation and practicing and failing and succeeding. Even with very live questions, I know that since Confirmation I am the person I am today because of the shaping, molding, coaxing, provoking of the way of Jesus. The church has changed my life over and over again.

Confirmation sounds final and perhaps our practice of it lends credence to that sense since we ask confirmands to make a formal decision about being part of the church. It is actually the continuation of a journey from the day we took our first breath and began connecting to the human family.

So, to those of you being confirmed today and to those who have walked with you let me tell you that the choice you have made- both to be part of the Confirmation process itself and whether or not you have decided to join- will shift your understanding of life as you know it. There are two guarantees I can make to you dear confirmands and fellow seekers of First UCC. I can guarantee you that you will always find resonance with the values you have chosen exemplified by this community. Those values will shape future choices you make in life. I can also guarantee you that the ideas, wonderings and certainties you have today will shift and change, both deepening and upending what you thought and believed because the world is changing so rapidly. Faith is always in dialogue with what is happening around us.

We can see that shift in the story from Acts. Here was a body of people who came together in community - some who had travelled with Jesus from day one of his ministry and some who had only just heard about him in a street rally. They were community in a particular way. As we heard Ed Langerak read the scripture this community came together by way of giving up their possessions, breaking bread together, telling the story and sharing so generously of what they had so that no one was in need.

They did this not out of obligation, nor membership oath or price they were charged. They made a choice in the moment, a choice that resonated with their values, their experiences, their understanding of Jesus' teaching and their hunch that this was the best way of many ways to live.

We gather here this day a people each of whom have made their own choice. For some it is the choice to just show up today, others have made decades of choices to be part of this community. If you page through these faces in these boxes on Zoom as well as those in the Confirmation circle yesterday who surrounded the baptismal font, you are witnessing the miracle of community. Nobody has to be here, and we all have a different understanding of why we have showed up at all. Blessedly, there are enough common threads that weave us

together as one. All of us are taking a chance on covenant and living into what it means to practice the courageous love and justice of Jesus. And... we do this imperfectly!

Even this early community we read about in the Book of Acts had their moments. If you keep reading into the next chapter you will see that despite their best efforts, they were not a perfect community. The next story is about mistrust and then the next story is about lying and cheating and the human beat goes on. We try our best and still disappoint each other falling short of God's least expectations of us. Even so, there is reason to rejoice in the ways we together contribute to the world God envisions.

Because we have a story preserved in Acts about particular people in a particular time and place, we know that individuals change the whole. Confirmands you have chosen us collectively, but we collectively have chosen you too. And in so doing, we know that because you and you and you are here that our community will be shaped and molded and impacted by you in ways we might not imagine. This church, every church can tell the story of a Mary Wood or a Bill Woehrlin or a Regi Haslett-Marquinn or a Don Tarr, a Jami Reister or a Sam Steinberg, a Lin Bruce or Dorothea Hrossowyc because of what they contributed to shaping the ministry we share. We cannot foresee how the extravagant welcome we extend bringing people together will change us, only that it will. Praise God!

So, confirmands you made a choice- a faithful choice today. It may have been a "yes" or a "no" or a "not yet," but your choice has impact on this community. And we in turn choose too- we choose to break bread, share generously, walk with you, talk with you, learn from you, be shaped and molded into who God is yet calling us to become. We praise God for you and for who we become together, all because you decided to explore, and question and wonder. We praise God for the way your journey and our journey will yet unfold because we will come to know each other. We can't wait to see what God is doing through First UCC collectively and in each precious cherished life here. Because you showed up, this body is whole and perfect. May it be so. Amen.