

*The Story We Will Tell*  
*Confirmation 2021*  
Isaiah 55:8-11

It hit me this week, as we were getting ready for this confirmation service, that the scene of it, the way our confirmands moved to the kneeler for just a minute as each of them was baptized and then confirmed, looked very much like the moment when I was ordained in the United Methodists Church, twenty years ago. That is true for all of us who are your pastors, every United Methodist clergy person. Just like our confirmation class did this morning, we stood on a stage with a whole group of people who were being ordained at the same time. For those of us who were ordained in California, it happened in a convention center, a place that looks even less holy than Creekside does. One by one we were invited to come and kneel for just a moment, as our Bishop put a hand on our heads, said a few words, and sent us on our way with the rest of the group, to live our lives differently from that moment on. There were no fireworks; our name was not written in the sky; the whole thing only lasted a few minutes.

Before I was ordained, I'd gone to a seminary that educated people from lots of different denominations: United Church of Christ, American Baptist, Disciples of Christ. My classmates' ordinations were so different from mine! Some of them spent months getting ready for their *event*. They shaped the whole service to reflect *them*. They planned messages, what the space and altar would look like. They chose the theme and the people who would bless them; even some of the words that would be said. Kind of like planning your own wedding, or birthday party.

That is not the way Methodists do things. In our tradition, even the most important moments of our lives—baptism, confirmation, ordination for people who are called to lead the Church—are done in community. We gather in the way we usually gather, with the people we usually worship with, on a Sunday morning that is not all that different from every other Sunday morning. You are called out as an individual for a moment, and then you take your place again as part of a group who will go out and live this new life alongside of each other.

I was kind of jealous of the specialness those non-Methodists got to make out of their ordination day. The Methodist students joked about our process looking a little like a cattle call. Move 'em in; move 'em out. I imagine you, Confirmands, might feel a little bit the same way today.

This church has a long and lovely tradition of celebrating confirmation and the students who complete this rite of passage. That tradition includes a dinner and speeches and gifts and a whole bunch of special stuff—that you haven't gotten to do. The pandemic closed the church's doors and your Sunday morning class just a few weeks before you were finished. You abruptly stopped meetings with your mentor. There was no confirmation field trip. Even now, a year and a half later, we aren't able to hold the dinner at which you would be the guests of honor. And here we are in Creekside instead of the sanctuary! If I were your age instead of mine, I think I too might say, 'This sucks.' I'm sorry.

But what if these interruptions and changes aren't taking away your special moment? What if they are making your moment?

Here's the thing. In the whole history of LAUMC, you will be remembered as the class of confirmands whose confirmation experience was a pandemic sandwich. One side of your journey toward this day began almost two years ago. And here you are now, on the other side of a lot of filling that you didn't choose for yourself.

You have held that sandwich together. You, each of you, has said, "I'm still in it. Lots of things have changed, but not everything. I still choose to make and confirm for myself a promise that says, out loud and to the world, 'I am a follower of Jesus Christ.' I have decided: I want to belong to a community that stays together to help each other live that promise."

So much of how we live, who we are, depends on how we tell our story. Christians—we, this church you have just joined—are people who are defined by the story we have attached ourselves to.

It's a story about people who want to do good things in the world, but it's more than that.

It's a story that says that even when it feels like everything is uncertain, or even falling apart, we are safe, held in the hands of something Infinite, *Someone* who loves us without limit.

It's a story that says that even when we are disappointed, even when we are too small to make things come out the way we want them to, even when we feel like we've been overlooked or treated unfairly, even when we are so tired of this pandemic we can hardly stand it any more, there's something bigger going on in the background, something meant for good.

It's a story a God who says, in the words of Isaiah that we read this morning, 'You may not always understand why things happen the way they do, but I am telling you this: I have not let go. I love this earth. I love you. Trust me: everything will be all right.'

Sometimes it's hard to see the truth of that story for our ourselves. There are lots of things going on right now that make us afraid or anxious or disappointed. Or just tired. But in these last couple years of disappointments and interrupted traditions, I think you can probably also see this: You, and your family, your school, your community, your *church*, came together and stayed together. No matter how hard it was, no matter how unfamiliar things felt, no matter how much we had to give up, we have done what we needed to do to protect the most vulnerable among us from the most deadly virus anyone has seen for a hundred years. We did things we have never done before, because this is what caring for each other required of us.

How will you tell the story of this time, and your life in this time, and your confirmation in the time of Covid? Will it be a story about disappointed expectations and traditions you missed out on? Or will it be a story of how you made a public statement of your faith and joined the church during an extraordinary time? Is your story about what has been lost, or is it about your place in a great drama whose last chapter, has yet to be written?

What you have said with your promises today, Confirmands, is that your life isn't just about your story. You're part of *the* story. With your life, you are creating the next piece of God's story. A story that is all about love and justice and healing—not only in *you*, but in all of us. In the whole world.

There's one more piece of Isaiah's message from God that I want you to hear today. God spoke to Isaiah words that sound to me like confession, and then a promise:

*These are like the days of Noah for me, [God said]  
when I promised that Noah's waters would never again cover the earth.  
Likewise I promise not to rage against you or punish you.*

*The mountains may shift,  
and the hills may be shaken,  
but my faithful love will never shift from you,  
and my covenant—my promise to you—will never be shaken.*  
(Isaiah 54:9-10)

This is *your* God. This is your story.