

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by Rev. Gail L. Miller, Pastor

May 31, 2009 Pentacost Sunday Confirmation Sunday

Acts 2:1-21

A Faith that Sticks

Did you know that there are two main types of tape? A chemist at 3M explains it this way:

There is “initial stick” and “lasting stick.” Initial stick is what you find on masking tape, scotch tape or post-it notes. This tape doesn’t stay on very long; it easily rubs off and the rubber adhesive isn’t that good. That’s “initial stick.”

Lasting stick doesn’t seem to stick so well at first, but as time goes by, this adhesive gets harder and harder. In fact, it gets so hard that after a while, you have to chip it off like hard cement. This is the kind of tape used in campers and airplanes and is made from a recipe of animal glues, resins and special chemicals.

I like the image of “stickiness” – especially “lasting stick” – and find it helpful when thinking about the Christian faith especially on a day like today.

Today is a High Holy day in the life of the church as we celebrate Pentecost, and our church as we celebrate the Confirmation of eight young people.

And it is my hope for you that your faith will be one with lasting stick, and not just initial stick. Many of you already know how rocky the road of life is – how unfair life can be – how unpredictable events can change your lives completely – how much things can change in the short span of a year.

For all that life will throw at you; for all that you will stumble over and through – you need a faith that sticks.

I want to share with you an email I received just this weekend from someone who is just a few years ahead of you on the journey:

Even though I am considered as an adult because I am 18, I feel like I just turned 16. It's hard to grow up. I mean [it feels as if] I never had time to be a kid. But If I could go back to be one I definitely would. I kind of get mad when kids say that they want to grow up and be independent when they are upset, because they don't know what they are wishing for. But I guess we all do that sometimes. It's part of life.

All of us need some thing – or some one – to hold on to who will carry us through. And if our faith is the glue – the stickiness – well then, we need to stick to something / one. We don't have faith in our faith – we have faith in God.

So often I hear people reflect on a tough time in their life and say, “my faith got me through it,” or “I couldn’t have made it without my faith.” And I always want to ask, “your faith in what?” or “your faith in whom?”

In the sermon a couple weeks ago I quoted from the Westminster Catechism – the first question from its “q & a” format for teaching the faith. It was Music Appreciation Sunday and the question was: What is our purpose in life? The answer: To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Today, Confirmation Sunday, I want to quote from another Catechism – this one comes from Germany, 1563. Its first question is:

What is your only comfort in life and in death?

And the answer:

That I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death — to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

That’s who your faith sticks you to!

Only God can forgive the unforgivable – since with God there is no unforgivable

Only God can free you from those who want to influence you in evil ways

Only God knows every detail of our thoughts and heart and loves us more deeply for knowing it all

Only God can promise us life with him after death.

Your only comfort in life and in death really is your God. He will stay close to you, but you won’t be so aware of Him if you don’t also stay close to Him. And when you’re stuck to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, your life will be better.

Better than what? Better than if you weren’t stuck to Him. Better how? That you’ll have to experience for yourselves. In the mean time, rest in the confidence and comfort of the Lord and aim high. You’re not too young to make a meaningful impact on the world.

Remember Apollo 11? The first manned mission to the moon, (summer 1969). You may know this, but it’s still astonishing - The age range (actual ages, not the average) of the personnel of Mission Control in Houston—the center responsible for Apollo 11 once it left earth’s atmosphere—was 25 to 28. The oldest person in the room was the Flight Director. He was 35! The astronauts were the old guys in the program—they were 38, 39, & 40.

Reflecting on the youthfulness of the program, the Commander of Apollo 11, Neil Armstrong, said, "This new Space Age required people who understood digital computers and most of the people in that category were in their 20's."

Do we still expect such greatness from our young people today?

How about in the church?

Previous generations have certainly produced at a young age those who continue to inspire us (some even have changed history).

The two men who wrote the Heidelberg Catechism, still is still taught in UCC churches today, were 26 and 28 when they wrote it.

John Calvin was 27 when he published his first edition of the Institutes.

Martin Luther was an aged 34 when he nailed his 95 theses to the door in Wittenburg.

William Wilberforce was 32 when he introduced his first bill into parliament calling for the abolition of slavery.

Dorothy Day was in her mid 30's when she started the Catholic Worker Movement.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was 27 when he delivered his radio address, "The Younger Generation's Altered View of Führer," in which he was among the first to publicly call Adolph Hitler's authority into question.

Martin Luther King, Jr., was 26 when he stepped up to lead the Montgomery bus boycott.

When God sends his Holy Spirit to Mary and she conceives Jesus, Luke declares, "With God nothing is impossible." (Luke 1:37) The Bible is full of story after story which demonstrates this simple truth.

Many of us can tell similar stories – of how God and His Holy Spirit have accomplished the impossible in our lives. Some of us are waiting for the Holy Spirit to make His move our lives.

Sure we can do our part – staying connected to resources of the faith: the church, prayer, the Bible, Christian friends and mentors...

But the faith that sticks is really the doing of the Holy Spirit.

And you know, there is evidence that the Holy Spirit has been at work in your lives. No flames dancing on your head – no weird languages from you. No a little less dramatic than that. The Holy Spirit doesn't always use special effects.

The evidence of the Holy Spirit in your lives is that you are here.
Today – your Confirmation – is a Holy Spirit moment – a sticking moment.

Today the Holy Spirit glues you to this church, at least for the time being. And hopefully you will become unstuck someday, because you've found another church wherever life may take you.

And if you can remember only one thing from this day –
remember that God's love for you is real;
and that what He wants from you more than anything else –
is for you to remain stuck to Him – for life! Amen.