

Lessons from our Confirmands

A Reformation Sunday 2011 Romans 3:31-34 plus John 8:31-36

10/30/11

Last week we celebrated the Confirmation of 14 students.

I hope many of you were able to pick up a booklet of this year's faith statements written by our 9th graders.

There are a few left back on the Purpose Center.

The assignment is to write a statement of what it is that they believe when they say they believe in God or what it means to them to be a Christian.

Each statement is supposed to be a short, personal summary of what they learned in confirmation and how it influences their faith.

This year's students did a marvelous job and so by using some of their words, I am in a way letting them be "guest preachers" this morning.

As most of you have heard me say before, I really do love teaching confirmation. It is something I look forward to.

I've been teaching almost every year since 1973.

My role has changed over that time; I'm no longer considered "the fun one."

That would be their small group teachers,

and youth director, Marcie Kimmes,

but I really do enjoy the material and the age group.

Maybe it's because they often tell the truth straight up.

Like Jonathan Rohm's description of the resurrection: Jesus rose after three days and stayed with the disciples for *50 days because they were **freaking out** and didn't know what to do. But Jesus told them to start the church and spread the word!*

Or like Megan Judnic who began her statement with "*I believe that God really loves me.*" but later added, "*Another thing is that EVERYONE is a sinner.*

Pastor Cath has made that very clear!" :-)

And I must have, because every single student included that in their faith statement.

Daniel Oyler "*Every single person is a sinner.*" and Morgan Schumacher said "*We all have lots of things we wish we didn't do.*"

I would tell them that they were loved and that their parents were proud of them and that I knew they were good kids but

I guess I also made it very clear that they were sinners.

Of course the importance of knowing that we are sinners is not just my thing...It's a God thing and a Jesus thing.

Austin Ramcheck chose Isaiah 19: 2 as his Confirmation verse which says, *“I will stir up Egyptian and Egyptian, brother will fight brother, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom.”*

I have to tell you that I laughed out loud when I heard it.

It's not the usual comforting passage.

However then Austin went on to explain to me that it was important to him to know that even in Bible times, brothers and neighbors fought.

Sin is not new and it is universal. He went on to explain that God helps all of us to try to get along and make things positive.

All of the Bible passages printed in our bulletin today tell us the same thing. We are all sinners but God cares about us anyway.

Jeremiah: *for I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*

Psalms 46 and the hymn, A Mighty Fortress is our God, describe God as our refuge and strength in the midst of chaos, which is often caused by human sin.

Paul in his letter to the **Romans** wrote: *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

In the gospel of **John**, Jesus replied to the Jews, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”

Yep, God makes it very clear, we are sinners and it's not just the individual sins either. As David Lohse a seminary professor put it, *“It's the whole broken and fallen world, where I now that nearly every decision I make from the clothes I wear, to the car I drive, contributes in adverse ways to the health of the planet and the well being of persons, continents away from me. Sin ...is inextricably woven into our existence.” **

But just as clear in the Bible and in all of our student's faith statements is the assurance of God's love. (Martin Luther said all baptized are **Saints and Sinners**. Through Christ, through baptism we are also saints—forgiven sinners. More about that next week on All Saints' Day)

Brent Huebner, remembered Pastor Plymire putting a little spin on John 3:16 by adding *“For God so loved Brent,”* making the promise of love personal.

Anna Koeppel tied God's love to God's forgiveness by writing *“Grace is mercy; forgiveness is love; salvation is God's rescue.”*

Cody Sauer, Morgan Schumacher, Daniel Oyler and Brett Swannell, all wrote that Jesus' death and resurrection *made the difference* and was the clearest sign of God's forgiveness. *Every sin is forgiven.*

And as Brett Swannell said, *“God forgives me and gives me many chances to keep improving, even knowing that I will always make mistakes and will never be perfect.”*

Ian Crum explained it this way: *“Jesus' dying on the cross is what saves humanity from itself by giving us a “get out of jail free” card. BUT it doesn't mean that we can just run around doing whatever we want because God loves and saves us. We can help others and then we can have fun on the other side.”*

Adria Shelly and Kaylin Tyczkowski both observed that “*we take Jesus’ death and forgiveness for granted and don’t appreciate that it cost Jesus’ his life.*”

Vanessa Jones wrote that “*being forgiven can teach us how to forgive others, even when they have done something horrible. Forgiveness can be really hard but God...gives me the courage to forgive others and to not do the same thing again.*”

As I read through these faith statements again on Friday, I was struck by how many of them talked about how important their faith is for them during the week, especially at school. They all have had to struggle with issues of friends and cliques; some have been bullied; others have faced temptation or felt isolated. And of course, some have had parents divorce or grandparents die.

Bradley Dordel wrote about his father’s serious Jet Ski accident and how important prayer is to him.

The good news is that they are already **very clear** that God is with them in the good times and in the bad and trusting that has made a difference for them.

In their short lives they know that they are not only sinners but because of Jesus Christ they are also forgiven and loved children of God who have received grace upon grace.

This is the good news for Reformation Sunday.

This is the Good News of the Gospel.

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