

Date: May 21, 2006 Confirmation Sunday
Text: John 15:9-17
Location: Zion Lutheran Church North Battleford, SK.
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Grace and peace be unto you from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ!

One day a group of scientists got together and decided that humanity had come a lone way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to go and tell God on behalf of everyone that they were done with him.

The scientist chosen walked up to God and said, "God, we have decided that we no longer need you. We are to the point that we can clone people and do miraculous things. So why don't you just go and get lost and leave us alone."

God listened very patiently and kindly to the man. After the scientist was done talking, God said, "Very well, how about this? Let's say we have a man-making contest." The scientist replied, "Ok, great!"

But God added, "We are going to do this just like I did it in the old days back with Adam." The scientist said, "Sure, no problem," and bent down and grabbed himself a handful of dirt.

At that point, God looked at the scientist and said, "No, no, no. You go get your own dirt."

Believe it or not, 15 years ago I was sitting right where you are today. I knew it was a special day. That's because my mom bought me a new suit and my grandparents and godparents came and my sister even wore a dress. Obviously my confirmation was a big deal.

But as I sat there in that front pew all dressed up sporting not only a new suit but also a new haircut, listening to the pastor go on and on for what seemed like an eternity all I could think to myself was, "Thank goodness this is over." Finally it is done. No more having to spend my Saturday mornings in the basement of a church having to memorize the words of some long dead theologian. Another half hour to go and I would finally be free.

You see for me, I viewed confirmation as graduation. And now that I was being confirmed I figured that I could bolt out of church like a senior graduating high school and never look back. I was done I was finished. I'd been tested and I had met all of my requirements.

And in many ways after my confirmation I did leave the church for many years. Oh, I would still come back once in a while and attend with my parents, but basically like most teenagers, the prospect of sleeping in Sunday morning was a lot more appealing than going to church. And furthermore, I had graduated from church, I had fulfilled all of my commitments to them – what more could they expect of me?

I had become like the scientists in the opening story. I thought I had things all figured out.

But soon, I felt that it wasn't the church looking for things from me, but rather me looking for things from the church. It appeared the older I became, the more questions I had: "How do we love our neighbours", "Why do good people suffer?", "How can humanity believe in God in the face of aids, war, and starvation?", and "What is the meaning of life."

And as these questions surrounded me, I remembered the things of my confirmation experience. In the face of atrocities, disease, and death I recalled the story of Christ's passion that was taught to me. To make a long story short, my confirmation experience gave me the tools to engage my faith and engage my church. The knowledge that I gained through the classes that I used to dislike going to, provided me with a lens to view my life and the world around me with.

And it is my sincere hope that you as newly confirmed members will also take what you have learned and view your life and the world around you through the lens of God's love made visible in the person of Jesus Christ- your Lord and savior.

As you leave here today with your hearts, minds, and faith sanctified by God, I am reminded of a story that Robert Fulghum tells.

In this story, Fulghum tells of the various business meetings, conferences and lectures he would attend throughout the years. He said that he would always ask one question of the speaker at the end of each of those presentations. And that question was this: "What is the meaning of life?"

He said his question was always greeted by laughter, and then by the packing up of books and notepads as people left

the classroom or meeting room. Yet, in spite of the laughter, he never stopped asking that question, because – just maybe – he thought, someone might know the answer to that question and if he had been too afraid to ask, too embarrassed to ask, he would have missed a vital opportunity.

One day, though, someone took his question seriously. He was at a conference on the island of Crete in the middle of the Mediterranean, where an international institute of peace had been established following World War II; a time when the islanders had experienced terrible suffering. At the end of the three-day conference, he posed his question to a certain Dr. Papaderos, one of the founders of that instituted.

Fulghum continues his story with these words: "Dr. Papaderos, what is the meaning of life?" The usual laughter followed and people stirred to go. Dr. Papaderos held up his hand and stilled the room and looked at me for a long time, asking with his eyes if I was serious and seeing from my eyes that I was.

"I will answer your question," he said. Taking his wallet out of his hip pocket, he fished into a leather billfold and brought out a very small round mirror, about the size of a quarter. And what he said went like this: "When I was a small child, during the war, we were very poor and we lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had been wrecked in that place.

"I tried to find all the pieces and put them together but it was impossible, so I kept only the largest piece – this one. By scratching it on a stone, I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine – in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find.

"I kept the little mirror and, as I went about my growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game but a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of light. But light – truth, understanding, knowledge – is there, and it will shine in many dark places only if I reflect it.

"I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have I can reflect light into the dark places of this world – into the black places in the hearts of people – and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of my life." (from *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*, pp. 134-135)

It is my sincere prayer for you that you will go from here and that you will constantly return to here- and in the process you will reflect the love of God made visible to us in Christ Jesus to all around you. Amen