

Sermon for Confirmation Day/ Easter 5B
May 3, 2015
Pastor Alan Bray

Grace and peace to each of you in the name Jesus, the True Vine!

Every year, on Confirmation Sunday, as it's commonly known, I'm filled with a strange mixture of excitement and dread, wonder and anxiety. And today is no exception.

On one hand, I'm as excited and proud as I can be of the twelve young people who will publicly affirm their baptismal faith this morning. But on the other hand, I'm also a little fearful and uncertain because I don't know where the future will take these kids. It's beyond my control.

I know what I'd like for them...**and I know what I would like for little Sophia who be baptized at our font in a few moments...**I would wish that they'd stay connected to the church; that they'd lead rich and rewarding lives; that they'd grow deeper in faith and closer to God; that they'd see themselves, above all other identities, as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes this happens; sometimes it doesn't.

Regardless, on this day, I find myself rejoicing whole-heartedly in the hope, the promise, the possibility of new beginnings...not only for these twelve ninth-graders...**and for little Sophia...**, but for each of us as well.

As I see it, in metaphorical terms, it's part and parcel of the ongoing pruning process that Jesus describes in John's gospel reading for the day. You recall that Jesus invites us all to abide in him...to make our home in him...to celebrate our connectedness to him...like that between vine and branch. And as is the case with any living plant...there's always a pruning process at work where the old and unproductive is pared away so that new growth and vitality might flourish. Pruning is a natural part of the growth process. And, **bearing fruit** is the name of the game.

Today, we celebrate the hope and the promise that these kids will bear much fruit as their lives unfold. And in their promises this morning...**and in the promises which Sophia's parents and god-parents will soon make on her behalf...**we might rediscover our own promises as well.

For along with these young people, we too wonder what God's Spirit will do with US in this pruning process. What will happen to US tomorrow and the next day and the next.

One of my favorite writers, Barbara Brown Taylor, heightens the sense of wonder and excitement as she writes:

(Whoever abides in Christ ought to...) "prepare for a holy hurricane. Forget everything you ever thought you knew about who is in charge in this world." (When Christ's Holy Spirit comes to dwell in you, prepare to be astonished...for under...) "the power of the Holy Spirit, shy people have been known to step up (into pulpits) and say audacious things. Cautious people have become dare-devils, frugal people have become philanthropists and people who

used to be as sour as dill pickles have become rich with friends.”

When the Holy Spirit begins to prune away at a person’s life, there are surprises galore in store for that person.

Today, dear 9th graders, my prayer for you is that each of you (**them...as well as little Sophia**) will be surprised again and again by what God has in store for you (**them**). Frankly, I can’t wait to see and hear what adventures in faith and living await you each (**them**).

And the same is true for you, dear congregational members and honored guests. Please don’t you dare think that God’s Spirit is done with you. Not by a long shot!

“Abide in me,” says Jesus, and I’ll take you places you’ve never even imagined before. Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, hang on to your hats. Keep your eyes on the Cross of Christ. Get ready for the ride of your life!

Amen