



Roanoke, Virginia  
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***“Remember”***

*Proverbs 3:3-6, Matthew 6:33*

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One of many reasons I admire this congregation is how seriously it takes Confirmation. Confirmation honors the transition from the inherited faith of a child to the claimed faith of the adult. It is a journey before it is rite of the church. The entire eighth grade year is spent in exploration of the Christian faith. Some of what the Confirmation journey means is exploring content; the theology of the church, particularly in its Presbyterian flavors. The journey also means the Confirmands explore their own personal faith- their own relationship with Christ and with Christ’s Church.

This exploration is both of mind and imagination. The imagination perhaps has never been more encouraged than this past year. The Confirmands were invited to offer something creative as part of their affirmation of faith: a dance, a song, a painting, a reading, photographs....

You can see some examples of what they came up with in Kirk Hall.

The journey culminates with a Service of Confirmation that is a part of our worship today. In that service, Confirmands will make their professions of faith in a more formal way. Many of them were baptized as infants are examples of others having kept their baptismal vows to nurture them in the faith: family members, teachers, youth advisers, pastors and role models. Two of the Confirmands will make professions of faith as adult believers and be baptized today.

As a charge to all of us, especially the Confirmands, I want to read to you first a proverb, and then what I consider to be Jesus’ paraphrase of a line from that proverb. Here’s the proverb:

Proverbs 3:3-6

Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you;  
bind them around your neck,  
write them on the tablet of your heart.

<sup>4</sup> So you will find favor and good repute  
in the sight of God and of people.

<sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own insight.

<sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.

The line from the proverb that I think Jesus paraphrases is this one: “In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” Jesus paraphrase is this: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

“Remember your baptism!” That was Martin Luther’s famous admonition. Join this admonition to the proverb and the paraphrase and I think you have a good charge to the Confirmands. It might be summarized as this: *Remain centered and grounded in God.*

Today, I would like to add a bit of content to what it might mean to be centered and grounded in God. I want to offer two things that I hope we remember as we seek to be faithful in this the complicated world in which we live. These are things are obvious to those who have had any kind of grounding in what has been taught and preached in healthy churches and healthy Christian families. Still, while these two truths, while simple, are slippery; while long remembered, are easily forgotten... sometimes *conveniently* forgotten.

Here’s the first one: **To be grounded in God is to be grounded in God’s love.**

See? To speak of remembering God’s love at Confirmation is like speaking of love at a wedding. How obvious can you get?

That’s a question I asked myself when I watched the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle? (Well, Dad and Mom watched it. I just happened to be in the room). When the American bishop, Michael Curry, began his homily it was as if he plagiarized my sermon when he said, “There is power in love. Why? Because of its source. God is love.” And then Curry went on to tell of Jesus answering the lawyer’s question, “What is the greatest commandment?” with the command to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength,” and then adding: “And love your neighbor too, just as you hope to be loved.” “That is not sentimental love,” the bishop said, “and not romantic love,” but selfless, world-healing love.

I had pretty much already written just that on Friday afternoon the day before. How did he get ahold of it?

Where the bishop went with that, I did not go. Curry went on to sound a bit like John Lennon when he wanted us to imagine what the world would be like if we all just loved one another.

That is an excellent imagination exercise. However, I think it unlikely that the world is going to cooperate by participating. So much of what people in this world spend mental energy imagining, and life energy pursuing, is not about selfless love but surviving, or winning, or escaping, or revenge. And that is why remembering to remain grounded in God’s love can be so easy to say and so hard to do. We are given the idea that we are not worthy of loved unless....

We are loved for your achievements.

We are loved for your looks.

or for our money.

or for our connections; our friends, family,

or the important people we know.

or the important people we’ve become.

The message is not *all* wrong. In the world we live in, there are a certain “business” to life and we all have to figure out who we can trust and who we can count on. We have to figure out

how to take care of ourselves- take care of business- provide for ourselves and our loved ones. We have to decide if we are going to be the kind of people who can be trusted and counted on.

Still, there are plenty of demeaning messages heard along the way as people are treated as a means to an end: someone to be favored if they have money to spend or ignored if they don't; someone to be enlisted if they have a vote to cast, a service to offer, a body to be used.

But there is that fundamental truth to be remembered that a baby needs to learn early if that baby is to be emotionally healthy. Babies who can do nothing to earn or lose brownie points, need to know unconditional love from primary caregivers. If they don't receive that unconditional love early, they are in danger of having something broken in them that is hard to later fix (Google "Causes of Detachment Disorder- it will scare you).

What I hope the Confirmands will remember as they move forward in a world where they sometimes will be treated as a means to an end: as an object, or a demographic, or a commodity, or a consumer, or as a plaything is this: God loves you for who you are, not for your utilitarian use. To remember you are baptized is to remember you are unconditionally loved. Esteem begins there. A healthy and responsible life that demands and shows respect leads from there.

The second truth of "Seek first the Kingdom of God" that I want all of us to remember, with Confirmands particularly in mind, is related to the line, "Do not rely on your own insight." Here it is: **To be grounded in God is to be grounded in God's truth.** That was said as a proverb thousands of years ago, but has particular relevance in our day.

We live in a time when truth we can count on is hard to come by. This is a day when "time is shortened and space shrunken"<sup>1</sup> to the point where everything seems to happen at once and everything seems to carry equal weight.

The world I am describing is the only world the Confirmands have known. It is the world where the internet, TV, radio, Twitter, Instant messaging, Instagram, and other media report events simultaneously, whether near at home or across the world with no distinction between the weighty and the light, the important and the trivial. There is a lot of good in this instant communication. But what can get lost is a sense of scale.

We can lose the *scale of distance*. We learn instantly of things that happen across the world and they are made to seem as if they are happening next to where we live. What is good is that we can identify with, and empathize with, the plight of those across the globe in Syria when we hear of hundreds of thousands of refugees, or in Cuba when a plane goes down near Malaysia, or across the country in Santa Fe, Texas when we learn of school shootings. But there are dangers. Individuals down planes and shoot schoolmates so they can be the world's news. We can stay in a constant state of fight, flight or flee if all the world's crises are local; and when that happens, we are easily manipulated.

We lose the *scale of importance*. We no longer have just four networks making decisions about what stories should be told within a half hour broadcast. There is a good side to that in that we are open now to wider perspectives from around the world, we can learn of important events and issues that can't be fit in half an hour, and we can hear the voices of the easily ignored.

But by having everything available to us by media, it is hard to figure out what is important anymore. By giving instant attention to everything, it is hard to give sustained attention to

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<sup>1</sup> James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World; The irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity*, p. 208.

anything. We end up deciding for ourselves what is important. If I think the lives of the Kardashians or the Royal family are of critical importance, I can find media that backs me up by providing endless stories and analysis. The same goes for the Green Bay Packers. (Want to know about the contracts the rookies are signing, or the free agents still being considered? I can find you twenty articles in the past week... *and it is the offseason.*) The same goes for Global Warming, the new Xbox 360 game of *Call of Duty, Black Ops 2*, the scandals of a politician or the machinations of a political party, the latest on the gun debates or the latest on the pronoun debate, or the challenges of poverty or the lifestyles of the rich... whatever it is, I have available to me media sources that will treat what I am interested in as the central, most critical, issue of the day.

Even worse, we lose the *scale of truth itself*. What we have these days is a *Media Buffet* where we can go down the serving line and choose what we wish to believe. Anything and everything that I want to be truth I can find offered as the truth somewhere. And if I hear something that I don't want to be true offered as the truth, I can find someone, somewhere, to discredit the source.

As a pastor, I can tell you that it comes as a particular shock to some people's system when people learn that some truths become so hard they can't be treated as matters of opinion. Doctors know what I'm talking about. They can tell you of the disbelief that sometimes comes when some people hear a diagnosis and realize they are not hearing a point of view. It is dangerous when life choices are seen simply as personal preferences, because life consequences then come as surprise.

Of course, once I start talking about God's truth, anything I say can immediately be called into question. What gives me authority to say what is true? Or the church? Or even the Bible?

I have no answer to that and that's the problem. Any vision of elegance, truth, justice, mercy and reconciliation is just a point of view. But there is the thing: we have to live with the truths we choose to believe. The foundational truths of our lives are always faith stands. We trust what we believe to be true. And trust that serves us well begins not with how we have been convinced but how we have been claimed... primarily, how we have been claimed by love. If you somehow know that you are loved unconditionally by God, and that God has reached you in the words and life of Jesus, then trust what Jesus said and did. In all your ways, trust him, and he will make straight your paths.

That has been my lived trust. I have experienced purpose and meaning, and I have seen others find purpose and meaning, by being grounded in the truths of God's love as illumined by the life and sacrifice of Jesus, which finds its best content in the *Sermon on the Mount*. It is the truth that God demands justice, shows mercy, calls us into a prayerful relationship, and calls on us to work for peace and reconciliation in the world.

If you feel claimed by God, it is not your head but your heart that is claimed. And then you cannot in good conscience betray justice, deny mercy, or refuse to forgive and be forgiven because... it is no longer a point of view any more than loving your best friend and hating your worst habit are points of view. It becomes the truth of your life that helps you sleep at night and get through the day and life with dignity.

So, remember, to be grounded in God remember to be grounded in God's love. And, second, let your search for what is true begin with the truth you find in the words and deeds of Jesus, the one who lived God's love for you.