



Round Hill Community Church

Sermon: May 17, 2009 CONFIRMATION SUNDAY

A Letter to God, Robert B. Culp Philippians 4:4-9

Eugene Peterson notes that Philippians is the Apostle Paul's happiest letter, and Paul's happiness is infectious. In fact, before we have read too many words in this letter, we can begin to feel a unique joy ourselves, for the dance of words and the exclamations of delight on Paul's part have a way of getting inside us.

But we cannot understand such happiness or joy simply by looking up such words in the dictionary or googling them on the internet. In fact, none of the qualities of the Christian life can be learned out of a book. Something more like an apprenticeship is needed ... being around someone who out of years of devoted discipline and service shows us, by his or her entire behavior, what following Jesus as Lord really is all about and what it means, and how it leads to a happiness and joy that cannot be contained with a simple definition. Moments of verbal instruction and reading lessons will take place, but mostly an apprentice acquires skill by daily and close association with a "master," picking up subtle but absolutely essential things, such as timing and rhythm and touch.

The Apostle Paul is such a master in service to Jesus our Lord and Savior. Paul doesn't tell us we can be happy, or how to be joyful. He simply and unmistakably is happy and joyful. None of his circumstances contribute to his joy: he wrote from a jail cell, his work was under attack by competitors, he was exhausted after 20 years of hard traveling and numerous close calls of great danger in the service of Jesus. And yet, he writes such words of inspiration as I just shared ... encouraging all who hear his words to think about whatever is true and honorable, whatever is just and pure, whatever is pleasing and commendable as we keep on doing the things we have learned and received and heard and seen through those who love the Lord.

In the presence of these ten confirmands this year, I have experienced the joy of sharing with them along the journey of their growing faith, accented by self-discovery and service within a community of fellow pilgrims. They are here this morning to share with us something of their discoveries, and they are doing so in the form of a "Letter to God." As you listen to portions of their letters, listen closely and see if you discover something welling up inside ... something like awe and wonder, something like love and respect, something like happiness and joy.

Confirmation Special Presentations May 17, 2009

These ten 7th and 8th graders standing before you this morning have now been received as active members of the Round Hill Community Church family. It is a special joy to welcome them into our shared ministry!

They are a gifted group of individuals, and I want to share with you some of the many adjectives that have been used to describe them:

- * artistic, creative, wise, mature, peaceful and centered, diligent in making an effort as a perfectionist;
- * enthusiastic, sensitive, wanting always to do the right thing, a social organizer;
- * generous, kind, one possessing a very gentle and calm spirit, always with a smile, a good athlete;
- * respectful, devoted to family, having a deep spirituality, a grateful person;

- * growing, easy to raise, polite, social and outgoing, athletic, loves family and siblings;
- * multifaceted in abilities, intelligent, embraces learning, a questioner, well-traveled, social;
- * persevering and hard-working, incredible at school, photographic memory, adventurous, mature;
- * compassionate and loving, easy to raise, self-sufficient, ethical and moral person, energetic;
- * friendly, quick learner, understanding, a leader, focused and motivated, a good student, helpful;
- * a lover of animals, enjoys reading and studying, creative, persistent, disciplined, musical, spiritual.

Our hope in the church family is that you may have special opportunities and invitations by which you can share such gifts in the years ahead. You are gifted in many ways. And our belief is that you have been blessed to be a blessing.

As a token of the special meaning of this day, we present you with these gifts in the hope that they may remind you not only of this Confirmation Day, but also of the special promises you have made in becoming a member of our church family ... and the wondrous gifts that are yours to share in building up the church.

(Give out the gifts ... sing 2 verses of Hymn)

Pastoral Prayer and The Lord's Prayer May 17, 2009

Gracious God, we lift our hearts in grateful praise for the precious gift of this day and for all the promises of our faith. We thank you for the family of faith that surrounds us and encourages us along the way, a gifted community whose members share of themselves in generous and loving ways, remembering prayerfully all who stand in need of your comfort, your guidance, and your acceptance by which we discover afresh who we are and whose we are.

We thank you for this occasion today, and for these young men and women who appear before us this day, having completed their course of study and development, to have their desire to follow your way in Christ confirmed by the church. We pray for them to realize how important this step is in their development as citizens of your kingdom, and that it will be not the end but only the beginning of their pilgrimage in the faith. Help them to understand that they have been provided with only the barest outlines of a map, and that it is now their life-long business, as it is ours, to explore the vast and fascinating territories within that map. Grant that their arriving at this point today may remind us all of the importance of our continued journeying in the mysteries of faith, and call us once again to the alluring, wonderful, fulfilling, and challenging road of spiritual discovery and growth.

You have blessed us, O God, with the ministries and teachings of Christ, with the long history of the church and its impact upon the world, and the teachers, parents, and ministers who have labored through the years to make the way of understanding and service clearer for us. Now help us, each one, to accept the responsibility of going forward, of using what has been given to us as stepping stones toward our own new exploration and discoveries, that Christ, who is not a destination but the way, may be glorified in our growth and excitement.

Grant peace to troubled hearts and hope to downcast souls. Give healing to the sick, comfort to the lonely, and joy to the mourning. And let the vision of your heavenly rule so fill our thoughts each day that we may see it here on earth and share what we have with the poor, make friends of enemies, and celebrate the name of Christ wherever we go, with a singing and merry spirit.

All these we pray in the name of Jesus our Lord who taught us to pray together saying: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen."