



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Come Holy Spirit and enkindle within us the fire of your burning love. In your blessed name we pray. Amen. Please be seated.

Good morning. This weekend, by the time I leave here today, I will have had the opportunity to confirm 90 people. Not all at this service. So with that in mind, I thought I would offer you some of my thoughts on the sacrament of confirmation. I have mixed emotions about confirmation and find it ironic that a significant portion of my call as a bishop is confirming people.

I was confirmed when I was 12 years old. I was in the seventh grade at St. Louis Catholic Grammar School in Alexandria, Virginia. We had religion class every day, and I enjoyed it. I liked the discussions we had, and even though I may have had perhaps more opinions than my teachers wanted to hear, a confirmation preparation seemed rote, kind of canned, like we were doing a thing for someone else. I mean, maybe it felt like preparing for a standardized test instead of pursuing knowledge for the joy of it.

So we did things like memorize the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, piety, fortitude, counsel, and fear of God. All of which seemed vague, obscure, and kind of made up, except for the gift of the fear of God. That one just seemed confusing. I mean, if God is love, why should we be afraid of God? And why is it a gift for me to be afraid of God? And why would I want to have a fear of God? It all seemed counterintuitive, and sadly, my teachers were unable to give me an answer that didn't feel as if their reasoning were being guided by a pretzel maker.

So we committed the stuff to memory and we prepped for the bishop. I'd never seen or met a bishop before. I knew that they were special. My dad was an officer in the Marine Corps, so I understood about hierarchy and I had an idea of where the bishop was in the church hierarchy, and I also knew that he wore an odd looking hat. Our teachers told us that the bishop might ask us questions, and they made it abundantly clear that it would be a poor reflection on us and them if we didn't have appropriate answers for the bishop.

So we rehearsed some questions we thought he might ask and came up with some answers, and we rehearsed for the service. But mostly what we did is we worried ourselves silly about the part where it was rumored that after laying hands on our head and saying prayers, that the bishop would then lightly slap our faces. Why, you ask? Catholic Catechism says the bishop lightly slaps the

newly confirmed to make them recollect that as a valiant combatant, we should be prepared to endure with unconquered spirit, all adversities for the name of Christ. Roman Catechism, Part 2: Confirmation. Supposedly this part of the confirmation rite was dropped after Vatican two, but apparently 15 years later, words still hadn't reached the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arlington.

But what I remember most, most vividly in all of our preparation is the teacher being very clear with me in front of the whole class when she said, Bonnie, this is a dress-up event. Wear a dress and wear pantyhose. No knee socks. All I can tell you is that right now I have on knee socks. So the bishop came. We sat through a long service. We went up one by one, the bishop prayed over me, tapped my cheek, and I returned to my seat having a sense that nothing terribly remarkable had happened. And I was miserable because I was wearing pantyhose and I knew it was going to be at least another 45 more minutes before I was going to be able to take them off.

Was I too young? If I had been older, might the ritual had meant more to me? Perhaps. Thirteen years later at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Teaneck, New Jersey. I stood before another bishop and was received into the Anglican Communion. This event meant much more to me. I was making an adult profession of faith. I was leaving the Roman Catholic Church. I had come out as a lesbian. I was embracing Christianity and the Anglican tradition. I was a senior in seminary and hoping and praying and longing to be an Episcopal priest. And after the service, I had a sense that I had both left my childhood and found my way home.

You might wonder, well, now that you do spend a significant portion of your liturgical time receiving and confirming people, what do I think about it now? First and foremost, I live in fear that I am boring some young person and wrecking their sense of God's call because I haven't figured out how to convey clearly that they are, that you are exquisitely made in God's image and likeness, and that God longs for you and loves you, and treasures you exactly as you are. No changes needed. With all of your doubts and your uncertainties and fears and hopes - all of you. And I worry if I am unable to offer this sense of enfolding love and care, that some of you will walk away from this service feeling underwhelmed and bored.

Secondly, I want you all to know how honored I am and excited to be here with you, and I want to offer you what I wish. I had heard from that bishop 48 years ago. I am grateful that all of you are here today. I take none of you for granted, and I am so happy that God is active in your life, stirring your soul in such a way that you have found your way here to make a public declaration of your faith. And I am honored to be the person who will stand in front of you, as you say,

with your presence to this entire gathered community, that you long for God and that you feel the tender touch of God in your life.

Know that the stirring you feel is real. The longing for God, to know God, and to be known by God is confirmation of God's presence, that longing is God. And know too that by being you, you have all you need to make a difference in our world with the lives of the people you know and all you encounter. And know that God loves you as you are and will invite you only to grow into being more of who you are.

We're in a polarized time, a particularly contentious time in our country. We are in time of impending change in our church. A time when we who claim to be followers of Christ are being called to embody Jesus' love overtly. There is way too much pain in our communities for us to continue being vaguely Christian. It is time for us to say in our actions and how we use our money and how we set our priorities, it's time for us to show in all we do that we know that God and the person of Jesus deeply treasures and loves you.

And loves everyone. Young people, old people, people who look like you, and people who do not look like you. People who grew up in this country and people who did not. People who vote like you, and people who vote opposite from you. People who need financial resources and people who do not. People who know that they have spiritual gifts and people who do not. People who have the power to alter our systems of governance and people who do not. People who have special flags and people who do not. People who are queer and people who are not. People who are non-binary and people who have no idea what that means.

We who are Christians, we who will make a public profession of our faith, and those of us who may have been hanging out here in these pews for decades with doubt, but coming every week nonetheless in hope. We are all called by God in the person of Jesus to do our very best, to welcome, to love, and to care, to learn from, and be changed. Be changed by everyone who makes their way into our lives. Today we are called to be the people who respect the dignity of every human being, every single day. And you are blessed. And we are blessed by you. And I can hardly wait to see what God is calling all of us to do together. Come. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Amen.