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Sermon Title: Confirmation Message
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:4-12

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Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Let me use a popular word that doesn't really exist. Confirmation is the "funnest" thing we do in church life. I have a pastor friend whose Confirmation classes last for three years, and I understand that. We love doing it, we hate when it ends; we miss the kids when it's over.

Two of our confirmands are outstanding dancers, so we got to know them best outside of Confirmation class. Julia Crews is a delight, spiritually mature. She's been ready for Confirmation since she was about 5! Brendan Valentine was courageous enough to meet with me one on one. He gave me the chance to enter into his life, to know his interests and passions. He's a young man with thoughts and ideas, plans and talents, questions, doubts, and faith. Both of them are perfect examples of the joy we have with the whole group, to see them growing, as the Bible says, "in wisdom and stature ... pleasing to God."

This whole group is on a journey through life, and they allow us to share that journey, all 38 of them. Week by week, they opened up like spring flowers, profound and beautiful, challenging and inspiring, provocative and hopeful. It's an honor to be their pastors. They don't shut us out; they invite us in.

Here's the truth. Each of these kids is headed off into the world, not all at once, not one big jump. High school is a whole new world. Much of it is good. Much isn't so good. Then they're headed off to college. The good is even more good. The bad can be worse. Then there are jobs, military, marriage, kids. All along the way, the joy for us is that they seem to like to have us immersed in their lives.

So, what the heck are we doing, exactly? Well, "exactly," I can't tell you because I don't know. Something happens each week. Something a little bit mysterious, a little bit miraculous. We don't take attendance or give tests or make them memorize. Many Mondays after the class is over, I say to Alida, "What just happened in there?" Their questions. Their answers! Their willingness and openness. We saw it in the Easter service. Their words, their prayers, their sermons, their music, their attitude and spirit and energy. Something happens in Confirmation.

We got the idea for Confirmation from the Book of Acts. Christianity was just beginning. It was as disorganized and chaotic as our Monday nights. There was no structure; there were no requirements. Yet something was happening! One day, there was a sudden outburst of Christianity in Antioch, so Jesus's disciples sent folks to check it out, to "confirm" that it was real.

That's what we've done. We have "confirmed" that these young people are "real" in the best sense of the word. "Real," as in genuine, alive, interested, vibrant. "Real," as in a faith that is dynamic, growing, personal; not forced, not rote, not rigid. So what the heck to do we do, exactly? On the most basic level, we're teaching them about Christ. We're introducing them to what we call "Christlikeness," living a life like Christ, the best we can.

On another level, we're "confirming" what you parents started some time ago, Maybe they were baptized as infants. Maybe they were brought to Sunday School or youth group. Maybe you came together to church. In some way or another, you parents took the initiative to jumpstart your kids' faith. Confirmation is our way of checking in with kids and giving them their first real adult decision: to choose on their own to try Christ's way of life, to join this church.

I went to see the new movie about Jackie Robinson, "42," which was wonderful. It's a great historical movie. It's a great baseball movie, and it's an important movie. It's hard to believe there was a time — in my lifetime — when a young black man growing up couldn't play Major League baseball. Or drink from the "whites only" water fountains or sit in the front of the bus. Or go to a decent school. It's important to remember where we've come from. Jackie Robinson wore number 42 when he became the first African American to play Major League baseball for the old Brooklyn Dodgers. I got to see him. It was 1956 or so when our family went to Ebbets Field to see Jackie and his whole team of "Dem Bums," as they were called, play the old New York Giants.

The owner of the Dodgers was a gruff, cigar-chomping Christian, Branch Rickey. And he was as determined to hire the first black player as he was to beat the New York Yankees. But he knew it would be tough and ugly; he knew it would take a special man to stand up to the hatred, the insults, the racism, and be stronger for it.

He looked long and hard before settling on Jackie Robinson. "Why Jackie Robinson?" he was asked, respectfully, because there were other great black players in the segregated "Negro Leagues." Why Jackie Robinson? Branch Rickey said it was obvious. "I'm a Methodist. Jackie Robinson is a Methodist. And God is a Methodist. We can't go wrong!"

I like that statement. I like that spiritual confidence. He felt he'd been raised to know what's right. And that Jackie Robinson had been raised to know what's right. And what's right comes straight from God. They were, all three of them, on the same team. I like that swagger, and sometimes you need swagger when it comes to doing right. That's what we try to give our Confirmation Class.

I don't know if Snoop Dogg is still a popular rapper, but he's changed his name to "Snoop Lion." In an interview with *The New York Times*, he explained that as Snoop Dogg, he had not been a force for good, so he's changed. He said, "Snoop Dogg was a part of the problem. Snoop Lion is part of the solution."

Our kids are growing up, and Confirmation is part of teaching them to be part of the solution, to be lions and proud of it.