

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

1045 Old Academy Road
Fairfield, Connecticut 06824

Telephone: 203-259-5596



Date: May 10, 2015
Sermon Title: Confirmed for What?
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

"You kids have it so easy today!" Adults love telling kids that; young people hate it. Most of it is exaggeration, but some of it is true, and I always tell the Confirmation class how easy they have it.

First of all, my Confirmation teacher was my father. Second, it was two years long. Third, everybody in the Confirmation class had to preach a real sermon. Fourth, imagine this: our church was in Queens, where we had the only official Protestant holiday in America. It was called "Brooklyn-Queens Day." Some called it "Sunday School Day" because it honored the founding of Sunday Schools in America.

All Protestants got the day off and held a parade. Just Protestants. Every June, Protestant church members marched through our mostly Catholic neighborhood. We had floats and bands and children on bicycles with streamers. And at the front of the parade, the absolute front, was the Confirmation class, the boys in their dark Confirmation suits, the girls in their long, flowing white Confirmation dresses; and we all had gigantic sashes across our chests, proclaiming "Confirmation Class" for all the world to see, all our neighbors, all our Catholic and Jewish classmates and playmates peering at us from behind the school windows and wishing for that one day that they were Protestant.

Wouldn't that be fun? Start the parade up here, march down Bronson Road, walk by Ludlow and Tomlinson, then up and down the Post Road, just as school lets out. The whole church with our Confirmation class at the head and sashes the proclaimed "Confirmed." But confirmed for what?

The idea of Confirmation comes from this Bible story in the long ago early, early, early Christian church, like 2,000 years ago, maybe a year or so after Jesus's resurrection. Christianity started to evolve. It started out as a little band of followers who honest-to-goodness 100 percent loved Jesus and knew that he was raised from the dead. They didn't just think it or hope it. They *knew* it.

And for that matter, they were all friends, they all knew one another, they were all Jewish, they all live in Israel. But step by step, Christianity began to grow. Each one told one; that person convinced another person. What started as a movement soon became organized religion, expanding boundaries and borders beyond Israel out into the world. One of the places Christianity popped up was a place called Antioch. This was a surprise. It was like finding Red Sox fans in the Bronx. It was totally unexpected. At that time, Christianity was headquartered in Jerusalem, so they did an obvious thing: they sent people to check it out in Antioch to see if the Christianity in Antioch was genuine. They went to confirm, *to confirm* that what they had heard about those new Christians was true.

That's what we do here. "Confirmation" *confirms* that our young people are ready and willing to be like Christ as much as they can. Most of our young people were baptized as infants. They were brought to Sunday School by their parents. They came to church with their families. What faith they had was given to them.

Today, they make it their own. Today, we confirm that their Christian faith is really theirs. It's what they want, what they choose, what they believe, what they live.

What got me thinking about this was our recent trip to Europe (you'll be hearing about this for years, so get used to it). It was amazing and fun and really, really interesting. We were in Venice, Budapest, and Prague: Italy, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. We soaked up a lot of history, and a lot of that history was about people doing bad things, and most of the bad things were done by people who had been confirmed! Little Protestants and Catholics who grew up to do bad things to other Protestants and Catholics. Nowadays, we are all concerned about ISIS and Islamic terrorists, but go back over the last thousand years, and just about every bad thing done was done by people who had been confirmed.

In our history books we read about German Nazis, Italian fascists, Hungarian communists, Czech collaborators, or we can go back to the 30 Years' War, the Hundred Years' War, World War I, or to Napoleon. Watch "Wolf Hall" on PBS, or stop at almost any monument in Europe. Lots of bad things done by "Confirmands."

So what are we confirmed for? What difference does confirmation make? You've heard enough of my sermons to know I was a pretty awful kid. What we used to call a "J.D." A Juvenile Delinquent. As the cop on the beat said, "Punk, we got our eyes on you."

When I think back over those years of teenage rebellion, I didn't do much of my bad stuff during baseball season. Every team I played for had some code of conduct, things we had to agree to, sign, promise, live up to. And I did, more often than not. It meant something to me.

I'd like Confirmation to be, for our young people, a reminder of who they are at their best, what they stand for, part of their identity, their honor.

To our Confirmation class: we are proud of you, you are an amazing group. Your ideas, writings, conversations, humor, answers, participation were excellent; your love is powerful. I'm not suggesting we make you wear a sash across your chest every day that says "Confirmed," wear it to school, to practice, to games, at the beach, at the amusement park, at concerts, or when you're hanging out with friends! But inside, right here, wrapped around your heart, and up here, wrapped around your mind. Put that sash right there that says "Confirmed."

Let the whole world see that you've made a decision that makes a difference, being as much like Christ every day in every way.