

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

1045 Old Academy Road
Fairfield, Connecticut 06824

Telephone: 203-259-5596



Date: May 6, 2018
Sermon Title: Confirmation Message
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

Call to Worship, said together:

Holy God,

Today confirms all our best hopes.

Today confirms that our parents and families raised exciting, interesting, wonderful, and faithful children.

Today confirms the presence of mentors and friends who deeply care for each young person.

Today confirms the power of your sacred message, your most Holy love for all the world.

Today confirms the spirit of our Church that faces every day with joyful hope.

Today confirms your blessing upon our Church that puts a smile on every face, joy in every heart, and faith in our very soul.

Today confirms that "our cup runneth over" with this abundance of teenage energy infused with Christlike courage.

Today confirms that this is a great day.

Amen.

Alida calls me "Debbie Downer" because I'm always introducing doom and gloom into every discussion. And our Confirmation class can back that up. Week after week, I tell stories from my life, literature, world history. Dark, dark, and darker.

We started out in September, everyone was upbeat and positive and energetic, and then I told them stories of my being kicked out of boarding school, expelled from college, fired from this job and that job. And that was just the first two weeks.

My wife says it's because I'm immersed in darkness. I read dark Eastern European novels. I am a student of the Holocaust. My current reading is about the Spanish Civil War, Communism in Hungary, and genocide. My current Netflix binge watching is a Norwegian show about Russia occupying Norway and

a German show about neo-Nazis taking over Germany. And somehow or other all this finds its way into one Confirmation class or another.

This is not to say we don't have fun! This year's group put a smile on our faces every week and made us proud at the same time. They are fun and curious, silly and profound, impish and earnest. They ate junk food and portrayed Biblical characters. There was plenty of laughter. We explained Church. We looked at Jesus. We tackled the Bible from end to end. We let loose their creativity and imagination. We thought about right and wrong and justice and, well, yes, evil.

I can't help myself. I guess I'm a bit like an old New England lighthouse. I look peaceful from a distance, but mostly I'm saying, "Watch out. Danger ahead. Sharp rocks. Boats have crashed here. Fishermen have died here. Beware!" Or, I can put it more Biblically. I'm like the "watchman" in the Book of Ezekiel. My job is to look across the landscape of the universe and our daily life and shout out, "Watch out! Be careful! Take notice! Stay alert!"

Let me tell you about our last event just this past Monday, our closing retreat and dinner. I took them out into our Memorial Garden. It's a place behind the Morgan Youth Barn of truly serene beauty. We have a big wooden cross there, and so we all gathered around and, yes, I talked about life . . . and all the challenges ahead as they move into high school and college and then the world that's waiting. And whatever darkness I touched upon, mostly all the things you're worried about as adults (or as parents and grandparents). Well, I was pretty specific. But I wrapped it all up in love. Because, let's face it, that's the single, one-word essence of this Church. And if they don't get that, we've failed.

Love. God's love. God's love for us through Christ. Love enough to die for. Love enough to live for. Love enough to forgive . . . anything, anyone, any time. And this Church's love—for them, for you. No limit.

Then we ate pizza. But I had one more dash of darkness to share. It's now a tradition here.

At the very end of the night we came over here into this sanctuary, everybody sitting where you are now. And over the sound system we played the darkest, the eeriest, the oddest song you can imagine, by the darkest, eeriest, oddest band I know, "System of a Down." They're an old Armenian-American band from California that is forever shaped by the Armenian Genocide, and that historical truth shapes their music.

So they sing darkly and eerily and forebodingly, “Can you feel the haunting presence?” And then they shout out the forces that do evil in our world. But then we make it clear. They, these new “Confirmands,” and we—you—all of us, this Church, we are the answer to whatever haunts us, whatever darkens daily life, whatever dares rise against us. We are the answer.

Year by year, we are training up young people who will soon lead. They’ll lead schools and teams and clubs, later they’ll lead towns and communities, they’ll lead businesses and charities and families. And if they lead with what we’ve taught them, our nation and our world will see a brighter day.

Two weeks ago at our next-to-last Confirmation class, I ended my message recounting a story from our “Sports Worship.” As you all know, every few months we have a special Sunday evening service that focuses on sports and lessons learned from sports, using sports stars from our Church and community.

About five years ago Fairfield Prep had a spectacular football team— first or second in the state—and we asked the coach to be here so I could interview him. And the key question I asked him, the big question was, “What do you want in a football player at Prep? What are you looking for? What do you need?”

I thought we’d hear about hitting the weight room, speed, size, practicing hard. Instead, he blew us all away. The coach said, “I want players who ‘love one another.’ That’s what Jesus said, ‘love one another.’ That’s what I want in a player. Players who will ‘love one another,’ look out for one another, watch over one another, hold one another accountable. With love.”

That coach, this Church, our faith, this Confirmation class—we all believe in the amazing power of God’s love. That’s what makes this a great day. And so I say, “Watch out, world, as this group is coming your way, and things will never be the same again!”

Let’s stand and sing our final hymn, “Be Thou My Vision, No. 595 in your hymnal:

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.*

*Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;*

*thou my redeemer, my love thou hast won,
thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.*

*Riches I heed not, nor vain empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always:
thou and thou only, first in my heart,
Great God of heaven, my treasure thou art.*

*Great God of heaven, my victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.*