

Easter 7 (A)  
May 21, 2023  
Text: John 17:1-11

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Good morning, Macy, Katy and Luke, Hugo, Pearl and Augie! This is Confirmation Sunday. You've been working toward this day for two years, and in a few minutes, as you affirm your faith, we will confirm that you are indeed not young children anymore, but are ready to enter a more adult role in the community of Jesus. As part of affirming your faith, we'll speak the Apostles' Creed together as a symbol of our unity with all of the generations of Christians who have gone before us. However, I know that some of us have a little trouble with the creed. What if you have serious questions about things like the virgin birth, or Jesus' ascension into heaven? Can you still say the creed with integrity? I'd like to say a few words about the creed and what it means for us to say it together. I'd like to offer an image that I hope is helpful.

I'd like to invite you to imagine that your family ancestry is Scottish, and your family is particularly proud of your great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, who fought in the Jacobite Rebellion in 1745. It was the last time the Scotts tried, by force of arms, to throw off English domination. Of course, it was a terrible failure, but your great (x8) grandfather is a family hero. In fact, your family even has a family heirloom—his kilt! Everyone genuinely treasures this family heirloom and all it represents. But I wonder if you might be a little less than excited if you were under the impression that at some time you would have to wear the kilt. Maybe it was something your uncle said as a joke, but when you think about the kilt, you mostly get grossed out wondering, "Were underwear a thing in the Scottish highlands in the 1700s?"

The good news is you don't have to wear the kilt, or with the creed, you don't have to pretend that you can think about the world just like the earliest Christians did in the first and second centuries, or that the only way to talk about the greatest mysteries in life is by using their words. You might think of the creed as like a family heirloom that connects us to all the generations of God's people, not an intellectual straitjacket you have to wear. You don't have to leave your brain at home when you come to church, because that's not what the creed is asking you to affirm. When we say the creed, we aren't saying, "I believe all of these things as an absolute matter of fact." The creed comes to us in Latin, and Latin has a word for accepting something as fact. It's *opine*. But that's not the word the creed uses. It uses *credo*, and the distinctive meaning of *credo* is "I am committed to."

So when we say the creed, we are saying "I am committed to seeing the natural world as God's beloved creation, a gift for all living things." I reject the idea that the world is just a bunch of resources for humans to exploit and fight over. When we say the creed, we're also saying "I am committed to the story of Jesus and his way of compassion and forgiveness, generosity and humility. I am committed to living like Jesus is the One who reveals what God is like, and what a genuinely human life is like. I am committed to the community where Jesus' Spirit is at work, where forgiveness is an essential part of how we live together, where every person is valued as a child of God, and we share the hope that through us, God is bringing healing to the human

family, both now and in the life to come.”

I fully expect that you will continue to ponder how to speak about God as Creator and the origins of the universe in the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago, the origins of life and human evolution. But when you say the creed, you’re saying you’re committed to living like you are accountable to God for how you treat God’s earth and how you treat your fellow human beings and all of God’s creatures. There’s lots of room to wonder about how to be fully immersed in a scientific way of viewing the world and be a person of faith. And there’s lots of room for different ways to bring those two things together.

For your confirmation day, I’d like to explore one part of our gospel reading with you, because, as you are confirmed, it contains an amazing promise. Jesus prays that God would protect his followers—that includes us. And I think it’s helpful to wonder together about what kind of protection that is. I definitely don’t believe it’s some kind of God-magic that prevents anything bad from happening to us. Instead, being committed to Jesus’ way of compassion protects us from becoming self-obsessed and bitter; Jesus’ way of forgiveness protects us from escalating conflicts until there’s no possibility of reconciliation, and maybe the possibility of violence instead; Jesus’ way of generosity protects us from greed and entitlement; and sharing Jesus’ way in this community protects us from facing the challenges of life alone. Jesus’ way of love doesn’t protect us from the possibility of getting sick, or having an accident, or getting hurt in life. But it does protect our heart, our essential self, from evil, from becoming evil. The news is full of stories about people who have nursed their anger and grievances, they’ve fed their resentments, until they’ve taken a gun to kill innocent people. They became evil. But when we are committed to Jesus’ way, when we shape our lives and our conduct by Jesus’ way, we are protected from becoming evil, and the more we become physical expressions of God’s great love. I am truly thankful for Jesus’ prayer for you and for all of us.

So today is really just a beginning. It might be the end of confirmation for you, but it’s the beginning of becoming an adult participant in the community of Jesus, where we encourage each other and are strengthened by Jesus’ Spirit present among us, to live Jesus’ way of love as best we can. And this is a life-long process. We’re never finished with Jesus’ way. Instead, as we move through life, as we learn and grow, we also learn and grow in how to be forgiving and how to have boundaries. We’ll learn and grow in our understanding of how much is enough, and when our neighbors in need require our generosity. The human family is in such a world of hurt. There is so much suffering, but I believe Jesus’ way of love is our best way to healing. With our response to Jesus’ great love, as we live with compassion and forgiveness, with generosity and humility, God can work through our actions to continue to bring healing to our world.

You might wonder how God can heal the world through six youth, so let me leave you with one last image. If you’ve ever baked bread, you know that it only takes a little bit of yeast to make the whole loaf rise. Jesus says God’s work in our world and in our lives is like that. It only takes a little bit of compassion and forgiveness, only a little bit of generosity and grace, to make the whole loaf rise, to bring healing to God’s beloved world. And you are that yeast! Thanks be to God. Amen.