

**Westminster Presbyterian Church + 533 S. Walnut St. + Springfield, IL 62704**

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## **Getting Confirmed**

John 21:15

Imagine this challenge: You have a group of ninth grade teenagers and 20 Sunday classes with them with one goal—deepen and strengthen their faith so they are ready to join the church. How would you do it? What would you include? Before our confirmation class begins each October I wrestle with this same question and I arrange and rearrange to make sure everything is included and the way I want it. Over the past twenty sessions together this group of ninth graders has learned about worship and prayer. They have delved into the sacraments and their own faith journeys. They have learned about church history and church polity. They have observed other denominations. They have met with wonderfully committed mentors from this congregation. They have consumed an enormous number of snacks and they have each read a gospel the whole way through. This whole laundry list of topics and themes is included so that, today, these young people can be confirmed.

While all of these things are important, they really do not matter. I'm certain each of the class members is cheering inside because they were pretty sure of this all along! So I will repeat myself, these things are important but, in the end, they really do not matter because they are not the point. For what is being confirmed today? Is the ability to worship correctly being confirmed? Is the orthodoxy of their theology being confirmed? Is their ability to quote scripture being confirmed? No. We do not confirm those things today because they only get us part of the way. What you do confirm today looks a whole lot more like the class Jesus designed for Peter by the sea.

What we read in John's gospel today are Jesus' last moments with Peter. They are the final words he has with this most outspoken of the disciples. Jesus has already renamed Peter earlier in his ministry, calling him the rock that will be the foundation of the church. Now, following his betrayal of Jesus and the terrible choices he's made, this rock finds himself on very shaky ground. Yet, in these final moments Jesus does not confirm Peter's understanding of right worship or whether or not Peter can fully explain Jesus' birth, death and resurrection. Jesus does not question whether or not Peter knows an adequate amount of scripture. He does not even confirm with him whether or not Peter will ever betray him again or make another doozy of a mistake. In this confirmation class Jesus only confirms one thing: Do you love me Peter? Jesus only wants to know if Peter is affected by him.

Confirmation, as we well know, is not for ninth graders only. As the years pass we are asked to confirm our faith again and again as Christians and, if anything, both the questions and their answers get more difficult. We can strive to confirm our faith by reading the best new Christian authors or attending as many worship services as possible or reading the entire Bible in a year and all of these things are helpful, some are even life-giving, but, in the end, what matters in our confirmation is the same: are we affected by Jesus? Do we love him and does that love change us? Because that is what he wants. Jesus wanted to know if he mattered to Peter, if the rock of the church was moved by him. Today we have these ninth graders who will join the church, adding to its foundation and Jesus wants to know if he matters to them; if he matters to each of us. He is not bothered if you have more questions than answers. He is not even upset if you have really messed things up this time. He just wants you to care.

Whenever someone is baptized in this sanctuary one of the pastors asks all of us to “remember our baptism.” Today, I ask you to remember your confirmation. Even if you were never “officially” confirmed, you have confirmed your faith many times and in many ways over the years. For many of us, our worlds get busy, we get overwhelmed, and our love for Christ gets lost in the shuffle. It is like the story a friend of mine told me of when we were in seminary. He was taking Hebrew at the time and being asked to learn to read and write ancient Hebrew in a four-week intensive class. All he had done, in what seemed like forever, was to eat, sleep and breathe this course work and its demands. One week he headed over to the chapel for worship and communion. He went through the motions, standing and singing when he should, then sitting and praying when it was right to do so. When he walked forward to take communion he said he tore off some of the bread, dipped it into the cup of juice, put it in his mouth, closed his eyes and thought only one thing: a-chal. He thought, “A-chal” It was all he had in his head and in his heart. “A-chal” is the Hebrew word for “to eat”. In this important moment, when Christ had invited him to share in his body and blood, all that my friend felt was the demands he’d brought with him.

So many of us walk through our lives only thinking “a-chal” and only feeling “a-chal.” We eat, sleep and breathe the details of our lives and its momentary burdens and we can begin doing nothing more than going through the motions. And these motions then crowd out Christ’s question. So today, remember your confirmation answer Jesus’ question for yourself: “Do you love me? Do I affect you?” For Peter this was the changing point of his life. He steps free of the burdens he has been carrying and sets aside, finally his old life of fishing and fear and he becomes the rock that Jesus saw within him. It is the same with us. Let this confirmation today—for our ninth graders and for us—be a changing point in our life. Let us step free of the burdens we carry and our old life and come to Christ’s table to his meal so we can taste and see and feel the Lord’s love and give it in return. Amen.