

Confirmation sermon

Acts 2:1-4, 12-16. When the day of Pentecost came...

Luke 11:1-10

St John's & St Stephens

It's so good to be together this morning in the beauty and colour and vibrancy of this lovely community and in the excitement of being with these wonderful people, deeply loved by God, coming to confirmation. This is a moment when we all affirm our faith in Christ, and commit ourselves to a life of discipleship, and the Holy Spirit is powerfully present, in the lives of all of us, but especially in these young people.

Now, I wonder how you came to be sitting here waiting to be confirmed.

You'll have been baptised (or if you're not sure, we'll baptise you in this service). You might have been very young when this happened, and you may not remember it. But, something powerful happens to us in baptism.

God makes a commitment to love us  
to forgive us  
to walk with us wherever life's journey might take us  
to give us eternal life.

And this commitment is absolute and total. It's not the same kind of thing as the promises we sometimes make to each other, which can be easily broken or forgotten. It's a promise which God never breaks, even though there are times when we may ignore it, or just not recognise this love which God has for us.

You are probably also here because God has put people in your life who have helped you to get to this day. They may be role models; They may be people close to you. They come in all shapes and sizes – parents, grandparents, Sunday School teachers, godparents, friends, clergy, and other people who have helped you grow in your faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

You are also here because inside you, there has been a change, a movement, a willingness to believe the truth of the extraordinary story of God's revelation to human beings in coming to live with us as a child, walking, talking, crying, laughing, loving, learning, teaching, wondering, attracting, challenging – and in the end being betrayed, accused, beaten, tried, condemned, executed and buried. And in a glorious final act, rising from death to life and returning to the outside of time, leaving His Holy Spirit with us.

And so, here you are, ready to say for yourself what you believe about God, and about your desire to grow as a follower of Jesus Christ. You're ready to say that you will rely on God and trust in God and that you will let Jesus Christ be the guiding force in your life.

We're all here with you, recognising and celebrating, that God's love and grace has brought you to this place.

Following Jesus isn't the easiest thing in the world to do. We all need help. And the help comes from the Holy Spirit.

In the Book of Acts, before he leaves them and goes to be the Father, Jesus promises his followers that they will be baptised again, this time with the Holy Spirit. They probably don't have any idea what he is talking about. He tells them that it is about

receiving power to be witnesses to him. They are still bemused, but they obey and go back to Jerusalem and wait.

What happened next is described in the reading we heard. There was a rush of a violent wind, and the whole house was filled with what looked like tongues of flame, and each person felt an inrush of power and presence and were able to speak in new languages. The Holy Spirit had come into their lives and had opened their eyes, and enabled their speech. They not only understood what Jesus taught but they were connected to him, so connected that they wanted to be like Jesus in every way. And as they became more like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, the more they were filled with joy.

Today is all about the Holy Spirit, coming fresh into your lives. You may not hear the sounds of rushing wind, or see flames, but when I lay my hands on your head, something will change, and you will be connected with Jesus Christ in a new way.

The Holy Spirit filled the Apostles with so much joy and courage, that they were no longer afraid to speak about Jesus publicly. They went out and started preaching the Gospel and thousands and thousands of people came to believe in Jesus. Nothing and no one could stop them. Persecution, torture, death – the Word went out with extraordinary power through human courage and in spite of human frailty. The power of the Holy Spirit.

From their beginnings, that day in Jerusalem, today there are about 2.2 billion Christians – nearly a third of the world's population. We Christians are in every continent and country on earth, and we are all signed up to following Jesus Christ. This is not a minority, fringe interest. It is a huge and glorious and

powerful worldwide movement. Let us not be afraid or timid about it.

One of the beautiful things about the Christian faith is its diversity. Throughout the world, there are countless different expressions of the faith, each with its own traditions and practices, all united by our common belief in Christ.

One of the expressions of the faith that has had a profound impact on many people, including myself, is the Taizé community in France. Taizé is a monastic community founded in the 1940s by Brother Roger Schutz. The community is known for its very simple, contemplative style of worship and its commitment to social justice.

Every year it brings together thousands of mainly young people from different backgrounds and traditions to spend a week together, chatting, learning, praying, singing and sharing silence. The worship is sung and spoken in multiple languages, and it creates a sense of community that transcends all the cultural and linguistic barriers which we put up. In a world that is often divided by conflict and difference, Taizé offers a powerful witness to the unity that we share in Christ. Richard and I are leading a group to Taize in August – highly recommended.

**One of the questions we explore at Taize, and which we all need to ask ourselves is How do we do this? How do we live this life as Christians?**

In the Gospels, Jesus tells us how to be his people: He says many things, but I want to highlight 2 of them:

"Follow me", - let's keep close to Jesus: that means talking to him and listening to him. We call that prayer. Pray as you can. Change when you need to. Don't give up. The model prayer that Jesus gave us. A bit about prayer.. The Lord's prayer. Persistence. We will get what we need if we ask.

He said "Love and serve one another" – every single person on Earth is precious to God, and as followers of Jesus, we recognise that and love them as dear sisters and brothers, and want the best for them. And that's even when we dislike them or disagree with them. Even more then.

We see Christians loving and serving others all around us. We see it in the kindness to strangers, in care for the sick and dying; In shelter and refuge for those in need.

In food for the hungry, and comfort for those who are anxious or in trouble.

We see it in gentle and committed care for the natural world, and passionate concern for the whole of God's creation – worked out through personal and collective action.

We are called because God loves us, and we are called out of God's love, to love and care for each other and for the world which God has entrusted us with.

Whatever the future will bring, and for some of you that may be feeling very uncertain, whatever happens, however much you don't manage to be the person God wants you to be, one thing

we can be sure of is that God's love for you will never stop. Just like a good parent; like the best kind of friend, God will always be there to help you and forgive you. To encourage you, and strengthen you. And every time you mess up, or feel discouraged or fearful, and turn to him, you'll know that he's saying "Don't be afraid! I love you. I am with you wherever you go".

You may not yet know fully what God has in mind for your life, or you may have already discovered it; but each of us a vocation – that means a living out of our lives in such a way that the Kingdom of God grows. You might be called to tell people about Jesus Christ with joy and courage. You might be called to love one person for the rest of your life, and maybe to have a family. You might be called to do a certain kind of work in which you can show God's love in everything you do.

There are opportunities everywhere in your life, within your school, college, work place, in the places you play and laugh and socialise, opportunities to show people what you believe by the way you are.

And sometimes people may ask you why you are a person who seems to listen, and care, and love, and forgive – and then you can tell them. Maybe you will be one of those people who others will remember and think about when they themselves come to be confirmed.

So keep looking, keep listening, keep trusting in the God who loves you and journeys with you, and may his blessing be on each of you today and always. Amen