

## **Fruit That Will Last**

**Pastor Luke Ham**

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A wise person once said “life isn’t just HAVING experiences...Life is about SHARING our experiences with others.”

And our confirmation class this morning has done just that. Over the course of this year, they have all shared their stories with one another; they have all learned together, asked questions together, had doubts together...had fun together. They have gone to Glide Memorial to serve breakfast to hundreds of people in need. They have met with over 140 other youth from other United Methodist Churches and enjoyed a time of fellowship and bonding at the Bishop’s Retreat.

They have taken the time to seriously consider what they believe....to reflect on those vows made by their families at their baptism...and today they will affirm those vows not just as individuals....but as a class....as companions.....as friends.

And the church does not simply listen to you as you say your profession of faith, but we make a pledge of our own...

So at this time I would like to confirmation class to stand where they are in their pews and face the congregation as I ask those gathered here to voice their support of you.

TO THE CONGREGATION ASSEMBLED HERE TODAY...WILL YOU DO EVERYTHING IN YOUR POWER TO UPLIFT AND SUPPORT THESE CONFIRMANDS WHO COME THIS MORNING TO ENTER INTO THE LIFE OF OUR CHURCH AS PROFESSING MEMBERS...IF SO, PLEASE SAY WE WILL.

Confirmands you may be seated.

I hope you can sense that all the people gathered here are ready and willing to continue to support your faith journey in any way possible.

As you enter into full and professing membership in this church, know that we are all also entering into a way of life that Jesus call us to as his disciples.

In our Gospel lesson today from John, we see Jesus preparing the first disciples for their next step in ministry. For Jesus knew that his time on Earth would be short, and he wanted his disciples to know that even though he would be leaving....his love...and God's love...and the disciples love for one another would remain.

Jesus says “<sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

So what Jesus is saying here...First off, he is telling us that if we live the way that God wants us to live...if we live a life based on loving our neighbors and not taking advantage of them or ignoring them, we will find great Joy. There is happiness in caring for one another and doing good for all of God's people.

Next, Jesus says that love sometimes requires sacrifice. Jesus prefaces his own death in illustrating that giving one's life up for their friends is the greatest sacrifice. Now, it might seem easy to overlook this part. We may not want to focus too much on this idea of sacrificing our lives for our friends.

But, I think there is more to this idea of sacrificial love in the name of friendship than just literally giving up our lives...

Yes, Jesus gave the ultimate sacrifice for his friends, but there are so many ways we can make small sacrifices that make a big impact in each other lives. Giving up a Saturday to help someone move.... Jumping right into the car without even thinking about anything else you have to do when a friend calls and is stranded because of a flat tire or dead battery. Sitting in the uncomfortable silence when a friend has lost a family member and showing our love though by simply being present...these are all the examples of how we love one another as Jesus loves us.

My favorite verse in this morning's reading, actually one of my favorite verses in the entire bible is verse 15. "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

I mean just think about that for a moment. I no longer call you servants... I instead call you friends...

Jesus....the incarnation of God on Earth....the person who has had the greatest impact on human history in the entire world....considers those who follow him friends.

There is a very well known hymn that we sing in the UMC that says....What a friend we have in Jesus!

What a revolutionary way to understand our God! Before this time, most cultures, including the Jews often viewed their God, Gods or Goddesses as cosmic rulers who controlled our world and lives like an amusing game a chess....

But Jesus gives us a totally new insight into our relationship with the divine. Jesus shows us how God's love is multifaceted. It is a love that nurtures and care for us like the love a father or mother and child... ..yet, it is a love that is rooted in our Savior through friendship. And it is not a love that is bound by limits...it is an unconditional love.

It is a love that continues in our lives today as we carry out Jesus' commandment to care for one another.

This means that when we engage in healthy, supportive friendships, that we are not only living out the life God has called us to, but we are tapping into something that goes deeper than mere companionship... we enter into a greater understanding and reality of the divine.

So, I challenge you to think about what kind of friend you have been to others. Have you supported those you call friends in a way that lends itself to the call of Jesus?

Maybe more importantly, think about how your friends affect you. Do you have people in your life that are dragging you down? Do you have influences in your life that pressure you to make decisions that ultimately hurt yourself or others? If you do, has the time come to maybe recognize that these people are not really friends at all? That God has something better planned for us when it comes to our relationships?

As you 8<sup>th</sup> graders take the next step in your faith Journey, I urge you not forget the importance of healthy friendships. I encourage you to care for your friends and seek our friends who will care for you. Remember that all of the people in this faith community are your friends and family. That the church is a safe place and we will do our best to be there in as your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our second scripture passage this morning tells the story we remember and honor today--Pentecost Sunday.

The Pentecost story reminds us that uneducated, confused, former fishermen and laborers were empowered by the Holy Spirit to start boldly speaking about God in languages they never even knew they had the power to speak.

It is a story of people recognizing that they are in partnership with God and through that partnership being able to do things we never thought possible.

I think this is a powerful lesson to instill in our confirmands as they move on to the next chapter of their faith journey.

Because things are about to change...Young Adulthood is now here. As many of you know our Jewish brothers and sisters mark the age of 13 as when you become an adult. As you enter high school, You are about to experience a whole new level of freedom in your lives.

But with that freedom, also comes with the responsibility of allowing yourselves to use the gifts and talents you have been given to show the light of God to the world in ways that only you have the insight and calling to discover.

Perhaps some of you might be a little nervous....

Because some of you have spent most of your time in school with the same folks you have known since kindergarten...you know where everything is, you know who everyone is and you got a pretty good grasp on how the middle school world works.

But high school is a whole new level. A whole new world of responsibility. Your teachers will and parents will be expecting you to be more independent. To get your work done on your own.

And your parents have to put their faith in the foundation that they have laid down in your life as children. Hoping that it is strong enough to carry you through your entry into High School and Young Adulthood.

And it's not just parents who have built your foundation up....Up to this point we have all invested in you and are praying for your success and hoping you thrive amongst the new and exciting challenges you have before you.

But I think the most important thing for you to remember as you enter a new world of responsibilities...and greater pressures from you peers to do things that are unhealthy....and more stress with schoolwork and sports teams and extracurricular activities. In all of that, remember that the church is here for you! That God is there for you!

It is a lesson that is important for all of us to remember--no matter the stage we are in. We are not alone. God desires to be a partner with us to bring about positive change in the world. A change so powerful, we never imagined it possible.

It sometimes becomes so easy to think that we can do it on our own or that, even worse, someone else can do it....But in order for us to live out our full potential we need to tap into the calling and gifts God is giving us.

And indeed we recognize the gifts that these confirmands have. Simply by reading their faith statements (which if you missed are available 1 per household in the narthex) we can see the character, experience and wisdom that you have.

So Confirmands....I will end with this....

It is our hope that you recognize that today is not the final step.....We hope you realize that Christianity and membership in the church means that your journey and relationship with all those gathered here continues onward. Jesus tells his followers to bear fruit...meaning to share the mercy, love, acceptance, comfort and spirit of God with others in our world.

We hope that it is through your relationships with one another, with the congregation and with our God that you will go out and bear fruit in the name of Jesus...Fruit that will last. Amen.