

McCabe United Methodist Church

April 29, 2018

Vocation: Living God's Call series

"Fearfully & Wonderfully Made"

Sermon on Psalm 139:1-18

Pastor Jenny Hallenbeck Orr

Holy God, may the words of my mouth, the thoughts of all our minds, and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you...you call us by name, we are yours...so may all we do and say bring honor to you; we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

It's Confirmation weekend here at McCabe United Methodist Church. During this service, six of our youth will publicly claim their faith in Jesus Christ...and their commitment to a lifetime of Christian service.

These six youth have participated in two years of Wednesday night classes during which we explored Bible stories, Christian faith, issues of discipleship, and the history and beliefs of The United Methodist Church. Their families have supported them in the midst of this process and, this past year, each of our confirmands had mentors walking alongside them...mentors with whom they prayed and had critical conversations about life and faith.

Preaching on Confirmation weekend presents a unique challenge to the preacher – especially in a congregation like ours where we have multiple worship services in a weekend, but where Confirmation is only happening at *one* of those worship services.

See, a preacher preaches primarily to those being confirmed on Confirmation weekend...and a preacher preaches to those being confirmed hoping that he or she will say something the confirmands can remember and hang onto.

Over the course of this weekend, hundreds of people will worship with us here at McCabe...but this sermon was written specifically with our six confirmands in mind. As I told them during our rehearsal on Wednesday evening, my sermon this weekend is, first and foremost, for *them*. And everyone else just gets to listen in.

For the past several weeks, here at McCabe, we have been in a sermon series about *vocation* – about God's call on, God's purposes for, each of our lives. This weekend marks the final weekend of our *vocation* series...and Confirmation weekend is such a perfect bookend for it.

(Incidentally, *next weekend*, we begin a new series called "The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss" and I can't wait! For eight weeks, Pastor Mark and I will be using Dr.

Seuss stories to help illustrate biblical truths. It promises to be both fun and challenging.)

Anyway... I've known for quite some time that our *vocation* series would come to its conclusion on Confirmation weekend...but, until several weeks ago, I hadn't really figured out what, specifically, I might preach about – or on which Bible passage I'd base this message.

Well, several weeks ago, on a Wednesday evening, our confirmands, their mentors, and some of their parents, and I all spent about an hour and 45 minutes at Eastgate Funeral Home here in town. Interestingly, during that visit to the funeral home, this message began to form.

While we were at Eastgate Funeral Home, Bob Eastgate – the owner and Director – talked with us for about 45 minutes and then he gave us a tour of the facility. We saw their offices, the casket and urn selection room, *and* we saw the preparation room.

Many people who grew up in the church and participated in Confirmation likely took a funeral home tour at some point – I know my Confirmation class did when I was in 8th or 9th grade. So it was a familiar concept to many...but, for others it seemed strange. *Why would you take a group of 9th graders to the funeral home?*

A funeral home visit was encouraged in the materials our confirmands and mentors were following together, so we decided to go as a class.

The *reason* a Confirmation class might decide to visit a funeral home is simply because death is part of life...and because, as people of Christian faith, we believe certain things about death – and about the everlasting life God promises us through Jesus Christ. We had celebrated Easter not long before our funeral home visit, so the timing made holy sense.

As Bob Eastgate talked with us before the actual tour, he talked about his faith and about how his faith informs the work he does with families through the funeral home.

He shared that doing the work he does – being part of funeral planning day in and day out – often reminds him to *not* take life for granted...and to build a life that's meaningful, a life that, in the end, you and others will be proud of: taking intentional time with your family and friends...finding meaningful volunteer work to serve your community. Life and time are precious gifts to be cherished – we should use them well and faithfully.

When we were at the funeral home a few weeks ago, Bob Eastgate also told us a little bit about someone whose funeral was happening that very week. The man was

a Korean War veteran and Bob showed us a Bible this man had carried with him through much of his life – including through his time in the Korean War.

In the back of this tattered, old Bible, in the man's own handwriting, he had written this quote:

“Faith isn't just about holding onto God, it's about letting God hold onto you.” Those are powerful words, aren't they? *“Faith isn't just about holding onto God, it's about letting God hold onto you.”*

I went to seminary with a singer-songwriter named Christopher Grundy who also happens to be a pastor in The United Church of Christ.

Several years ago he wrote a song about the struggle to hold onto God, the struggle to allow God to hold onto you, in the midst of all life can bring. The song focuses on struggles that many *youth* face every day, but there's a lot of meaning in it for people of any age.

The song is called “Out on This Wire” and the words go like this:

“It seems as though not long ago when I was just a kid / I never had to agonize about each thing I did / but now there are so many voices calling out my name / it's enough to make me wonder, ‘Whose life is it anyway?’

“Cause the boss man says, ‘You should be working longer hours,’ / and the in crowd says, ‘Better try a puff of these,’ / and the war man says, ‘Come and offer up your body,’

“So, Holy One, hold my hand as I walk out on this wire / trying to balance while juggling the knives and the fire / help me to choose what I'm gonna live for / so I will find my life's still mine and I am yours.

“She's always been a nice girl, / always done the best she could / she goes to church, she plays the flute / her grades are mostly good / but when the day is over / and her back's still to the wall / she gets this sinking feeling / that she'll never please them all.

“Cause her head coach says, / ‘Give me all or give me nothing,’ / and her mother says, / ‘You should spend more time at home,’ / and her boyfriend says, ‘You could show me that you love me, alone,’ / and she prays...

“Holy One, hold my hand as I walk out on this wire / trying to balance while juggling the knives and the fire / help me to choose what I'm gonna live for / so I will find my life's still mine and I am yours.

“And the T.V. says, ‘Money’s still the only answer,’ / and the preacher says, ‘Ours is still the only way,’ / and the cover girl whispers, ‘Shouldn’t you be thinner like me?’ / “So, Holy One, hold my hand as I walk out on this wire / trying to balance while juggling the knives and the fire / help me to choose what I’m gonna live for / so I will find my life’s still mine and I am yours.”

The imagery of the tightrope-walk is so powerful...even more powerful is the urgent prayer that God hold our hands as we walk out onto the wire.

“Faith isn’t just about holding onto God. Faith is also about letting God hold onto you.”

Most of us learn at a relatively young age that there are times when we desperately need to be *held*.

Friends betray us. Our hearts get broken. We don't make the team. A test or a project comes back with a grade we don't like. Life is more chaotic than we can handle. We have no idea what direction we should go when it comes to school or work. Something scary happens to one of our parents, grandparents, or friends.

When these things happen, we feel lonely, anxious...and we need to be held tightly by one who knows us and who we trust will always love us, no matter what. That's where today's Scripture from Psalm 139 comes in with its reminder that God searches us and knows us, inside and out...its reminder that God is always with us... that God made us – fearfully and wonderfully.

Those are some of my absolute favorite words of Scripture:

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

And these words are true whether or not they *feel* true. I remember how strange and awkward I often felt when I was a teenager – wishing I were thinner, prettier...wishing I felt less shy and more confident more of the time.

If I had one message for my teenage self, it would be the message of Psalm 139 – the message that I am fearfully and wonderfully made, the message that the God who made me promises to *hold onto me* no matter what. It's a message I hope we can *all* hold onto...a message I especially hope the six of you can hold onto.

As I said earlier, this is the final weekend of our *vocation* sermon series. Our *vocation* is all about who God created us to be – fearfully and wonderfully...and it is about how we put our unique gifts and talents to work for good in the world.

Ben, Hailey, Lindsay, Landon, Cloe, and Ela: the six of you are about to publicly claim your faith in Jesus Christ. I know you are also on your own journeys of figuring out who God made you to be and what God created you to *do* in this world.

Really, that's a lifelong journey. Confirmation is never an end point in our faith; it's always a pit stop along the way – a milestone to celebrate learning and growth...a doorway through which we walk toward the next phase of life and faith.

Committing ourselves and our lives to Jesus Christ is a *daily* task for those of us who call ourselves Christian. So is remembering that we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God...in fact, for many of us, we need to be reminded of *that* fact multiple times every day.

Because when things in life get tough or confusing or scary, it's so easy to forget that we are, in fact, fearfully and wonderfully made by God...that God made us *for good* in this world...and that God holds onto us through it all, no matter what.

Let us pray...

Holy One, you created us...you made us fearfully and wonderfully. For that, we are so thankful. Yet you know there are times we forget that you have been with us since before we were born – times we forget that you made us on purpose and for a purpose. Today, tomorrow, and always, help us to hold onto you, and to let you hold onto us, so we might remain faithful to you...and so we might put to work the gifts and talents you've given us. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.