

# Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

## Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from June 17, 2007

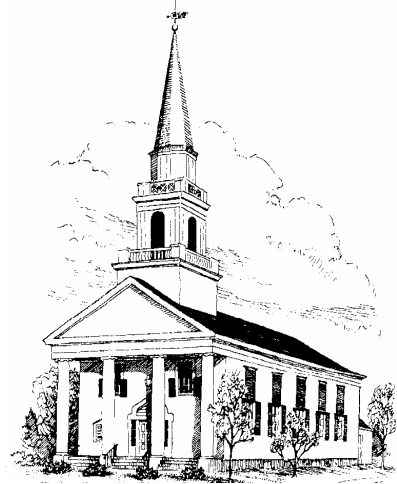
Rev. Barbara J. Libby

**“Called by Name”**

Scriptures:

Isaiah 43:1-7, Psalm 139

2 Corinthians 5:15-20



What a wonderful thing it is to be here this morning ready to celebrate the confirmation of 5 of this church's finest young people. These young people made a commitment at the beginning of this school year to be actively engaged in twice-monthly classes with the pastor, regular meetings with an adult mentor, some time spent in service projects, and regular attendance at worship.

Today, we come to consider and recall again the words of commitment that we each made at either our baptism or our confirmation. We will affirm with our confirmands what we believe and we will also affirm the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ as we welcome these youth into full membership. We will participate with, and agree to support, these new members as they commit to their faith journeys and to their role as members here at Mystic Congregational Church.

I've chosen three texts especially for today's service—a reading from the prophet Isaiah, a Psalm, and a reading from Paul's letter to the church at Corinth. Each of these readings has something to say to us about what it means to be chosen by God and to be in relationship with God.

We might make the following shorthand summaries about each of our texts:

Isaiah tells us “God calls us by name”.

The Psalm suggests that “God knows each one of us”, and

Paul tells us “God redeems and befriends us”.

Preaching for a Confirmation Sunday can be almost as daunting as preaching on an Easter Sunday. There is a sense of wanting to “say it all” for such a special occasion. There's a sense of wanting to sum it all up. And not because this is a “graduation ceremony” for these youth. One of the things that this class of confirmands has heard, probably more than anything else in the course of our time together, is that this confirmation process is not a graduation from anything! Rather, we have examined in our time together how confirmation is all about affirming our faith as a lifelong journey of faith. I believe that confirmation is all about making a commitment to an ongoing and ever-changing faith process, a process that will take a lifetime, and more, to complete.

Confirmation Day is hopefully a day to bring the whole thing into focus. I chose three texts to try to help make it more clear. Today is all about how God has a plan for each one of us, how God knows us better than we know ourselves, and how God is ultimately the source for our knowing who we are and whose we are.

Isaiah seems to cry out with reassurance for everyone—*Don't be afraid!* God has already redeemed each of us. God has already called us by name. We are God's. No matter what happens in our lives, we are encouraged to trust God. No matter how difficult life might be for us at any particular point in time, trust God. God cares for each one of us and we don't ever need to fear anything, for God will always be there with us no matter what!

Today's Psalm offers us words of assurance and comfort. God knows us, perhaps better than we know ourselves. None of us is an accident; we are each *intended* children of God. God is always here with us. No matter who we are and no matter where we are on life's journey, God is always with us. God not only created us but continues to love us without conditions in spite of all our flaws and mistakes. Simply put, God knows it all and still cares for us, even into a life eternal.

I don't hear these words of the psalmist as if God has some sort of huge cosmic database recording every negative thought or act we commit. I do hear that God knows each of us and is always with us. We are never in a place where God is not. There is no part of our life, whether good or bad, where God is absent from us. We are never alone.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians suggests that one of the most important questions we human beings can consider asking in our lives is the question: *Who are we?* Each of us needs to ask ourselves this question over and over again throughout our lives: *Who are we?* Each of us probably can answer that question in different ways. Some of us might answer the question with a description of what we do and how we spend our time. Other of us might answer the question with what we believe or what we hold as important in our lives.

*Who are we?* Our faith offers us some remarkable answers to that question. God forms each of us. God nourishes us with love. God's mercy preserves and protects us. God's everlasting presence invites our trust. God's gift of Jesus offers us redemption and the gift of eternal life.

Many of us find the thought of being considered ordinary an insulting thought. We perhaps have built our lives, our reputations, our careers, our ambitions—large and small—on being extraordinary. We may find it almost offensive if we consider ourselves “just ordinary”. Yet the Christian faith is founded upon the experiences and the expectations of ordinary people. Are we ordinary? Yes. Are we extraordinary in God's eye? Yes.

As Christians, we are so much more than we could ever imagine being by ourselves. Today's translation from Paul's letter invites us to consider that “anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons!” Paul invites us to consider what it means to be a new creation. As disciples of Jesus Christ we are invited to be new creations.

What does it mean then that God knows who we are, that God know us, even if we don't think we really know who we are? It means that God knows all our gifts and talents. God knew us from the beginning and God will continue to know us as we move through each day of our lives. God knows us on our good days and our bad days. I believe that God wants each one of us to use all that we have been given—those talents and gifts and special abilities that we have been given—to help others and to make the world a better place.

God also wants us to be our authentic selves. God wants us to be ourselves and that just might be the most powerful expression of faithfulness we can offer.

The Bible is full of women and men who do not live or face the world on the world's terms. We

read biblical stories about a few extraordinary people. Much occurs and many amazing things happen by the work of ordinary people. With the spirit of God actively at work in the world, even the most ordinary of us can do something extraordinary.

Paul Tillich, the well-known theologian, once noted that saints are saints not because of goodness but because they are transparent for something that is more than themselves. Perhaps what need to aim for is being a window of opportunity, a means of grace. Perhaps what we need to aim to be is a place in which the Holy Spirit can make its dwelling and can do extraordinary things with those of us who are simply ordinary folks.

In just a few minutes now (at the 10 a.m. service), I will be calling each of us today's confirmands by name. I will be calling Elizabeth Jay, Thomas Manning, Marissa Peck, Alexandra Rogers and Abby Singer forward for their confirmation. Each of them will be asked to testify to their faith in a very public way—in front of family and friends, in front of members of this church, in front of those who know them and those who don't know them at all. Most importantly perhaps is that today they testify to their faith in front of God.

Each of them will be invited to claim for himself/herself that he/she is ready to affirm his/her baptism and assume the rights and responsibilities of adult membership in this church, as a faithful adult member of this church.

As we move through this day, let us walk with an awareness of the God who call each of us by name, the God who knows each one of us, the God who befriends us and redeems us. We will, shortly, invoke the power of the Holy Spirit to actively move in each of the lives of these confirmands in every day of their lives.

Who knows what extraordinary things they might do? Who knows what extraordinary ways their lives might make a difference in this world? Who knows? *God knows!*

Amen.

