

Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from June 15, 2008

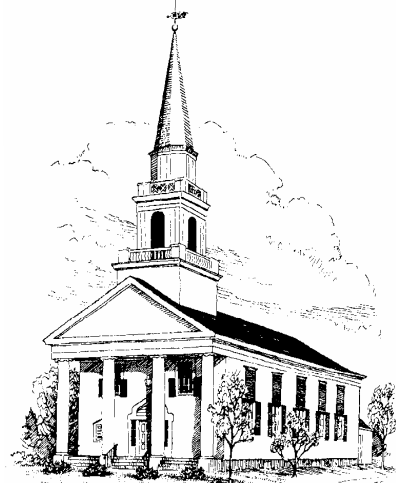
Rev. Barbara J. Libby

“Become What You Believe”

Scriptures:

Psalm 100

Matthew 9:35-10:8



Did you ever see one of those classified ads where you are guaranteed to make \$2000 a week for merely stuffing envelopes in your home? Always sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Even a little bit tempting in some sort of odd way. Well, it compares quite terribly with the job offer Jesus makes to his followers in today's text: No pay. No place to stay. Guaranteed opposition, even perhaps persecution. Being dragged to court. Maybe having your family turn against you. I don't think Jesus' job offer would make good press, do you?

And yet, today is a day of confirmation for five of our young people. Today invites us each to ask ourselves: What does it mean to reaffirm our baptismal vows? What does it mean for us to be a member of this church as these young people choose to join this church at this point in their faith journey?

Our text from Matthew's Gospel invites us to also consider what the church is supposed to be about. Today we catch a glimpse of what Jesus believed it meant to be a disciple and what it might mean for us to be bearers of the Good News. Jesus himself suggests in today's passage that to be his follower is all about healing, teaching, and proclaiming the Good News. Jesus makes it clear that to be a disciple is to be in motion, not something static. Jesus is not talking about a stay-at-home faith. He is not talking about a preserve-our-level-of-comfort or a let-them-come-to-us spirituality. Jesus suggests in no uncertain terms that being his follower and being a bearer of the Good News requires us to make a bold "going-out" into the world. To be Christ's disciple means to "become what you believe."

Jesus was all about being in motion and moving others along. Jesus saw the world as it really is—with all its hungers and confusions, with all its pain and its sorrow, with all its problems and dilemmas. Jesus calls us to respond to the world's needs with compassion and tender care. We are not called to sit still. Jesus calls us to be on the move, open to those we meet along the way, and willing to "be survivors!"

Someone puts it this way: *The gospel impels us to interact with the world beyond our walls, right in our own neighborhood, or in places far away, places which our compassion can reach even though we may never physically go there ourselves.* (Sermon Seeds, UCC Online)

Resource)

Confirmation is all about leaving the world as we know it and Christ, so we can re-enter the world and really become the church. What is good news for us may be bad news for others. In the Westminster Bible commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Thomas G. Long suggests:

Any notion that the church ought to quit getting involved in non-spiritual matters and get back to its “real job” of preaching the Gospel and saving souls misses the point. “Preaching the Gospel and saving souls” means grappling with disease and the demonic, with social segregation and the powers of death. It means, therefore, wrestling with issues of public health care, with racial and social alienation, with the powers of domination and oppression that bleed the life out of a community.

What we need to say to these young people, what we must say to these young people here today before they are confirmed, is this: Lily, Kim, Kelsey, Duncan, and Elizabeth—to be a part of the church of Jesus Christ is to be a part of a radical organization! And that is good news!

To be a part of this church and to actively commit to growing our faith will make many things possible and it will not make things easy. To be a part of the church of Jesus Christ is to be an active participant in doing the faith. Francis of Assisi is often quoted as saying,

Preach the gospel and, when necessary, use words.

Throughout this confirmation process this year we have emphasized over and over again that our faith journey is a lifetime process. There’s no graduation involved in this rite of confirmation here today. This is not an excuse to stay home or to avoid church or to walk away from things here today. Today is another step in your lifetime journey of faith. Today opens another door and represents a step over the threshold of another part of the journey of faith, another step on the stairs of your faith. Today is a new beginning for an enlarged concept of what it means to be a Christian.

Today, Lily, Kim, Kelsey, Duncan, and Elizabeth, you come before this gathered body, in front of family and friends and even those you hardly know at all, to claim for yourself the words of your baptism. Today you claim a baptism that happened for each of you many years back now ago. Your folks and some of your relatives may actually remember that baptism day of yours. Today you choose to come before us all to declare what you believe for yourselves. Today we will first ask you to renounce the power of evil and we know about all the evil in this world. This is a very ancient custom, this renouncing of evil as your first step and then you will be asked to affirm your baptism into the faith and family of Jesus Christ.

That affirmation will take place for each of you in front of a communion table that displays running water—a reminder to us all of the waters of baptism. Even as we watch you affirm your baptism, each of us is considering these same questions and pondering where our faith journey has brought us and what more we need to consider and work on as we move along on our own faith journeys. By this confirmation today, Lily, Kim, Kelsey, Duncan, and Elizabeth, you offer each of us the opportunity for us to renew our faith and to examine our own

journeys of faith.

Next, your parents and your mentors, those adults who have been working and meeting with you, will also agree to continue to support and encourage you in your ongoing faith journey. Then all the rest of the congregation here gathered will also be invited to reaffirm our rejection of sin and our commitment to Jesus Christ. Each confirmand will then each be asked, individually, whether they believe in God, whether they believe in Jesus Christ, and whether they believe in the Holy Spirit. Each of the rest of us, too, will be asking ourselves to re-examine those same questions even as you young people are doing so.

Let's review for a minute, Lily, Kim, Kelsey, Duncan, and Elizabeth. Does this mean you have all the answers about these faith matters? Does this mean that you have your faith all neatly tied up in a bundle and that you will carry around that same bundle of faith decisions with you forever and ever until the day you die? Or does it instead mean perhaps, that today, each of you will agree to declare that you will commit to continue to grow in your relationship with God as revealed to each of us in the scriptures and in the form of a triune God—Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. How long will that growth take you, confirmands? Yes, a lifetime! Does God still speak to us? Does God still surprise us? Does God pull us together? Does God plant us and also send us out into the most unexpected of places? Yes, God does all these things.

Today, confirmands, you become full-fledged adult members of this congregation by your choice. As a result, you will be expected to fulfill all of the obligations of a full member here at Mystic Congregational Church. So remember: we believe in a triune God—Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit. And that last one, that Holy Spirit, it has a lot to do with how God gets things done by us.

Remember—the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our midst gifts each of us with God's presence in every day of our life. That Holy Spirit works through us and works through the life of the church and that Spirit will send us out into the world to be the workers for the harvest that Jesus talked about for we are the harvest hands that Jesus speaks of in today's lesson.

May each of us this day be reminded and renewed in our faith. May the power of the Holy Spirit continue to move through us all. Amen.

