

# Confirming Your Calling

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Date: 03 November 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. Welcome to Church of the Advent, especially if you're new, joining us for the first time.

This morning we're going to do something a little different. We're going to be talking about something that happens in the life of the church, something called confirmation. And the reason we're doing this is because beginning next May, we're going to have our first of what will become regular confirmation services in the life of Church of the Advent.

So there'll be an opportunity for anyone who would like to be confirmed next May. And we want to talk about it now because in order to be confirmed, you have to take our Foundations class, which will be starting up again in January.

And so we want to make sure that people know what it is so that they're prepared so that if this is something that you would like to take part in, you'll be able to do that when our bishop visits. And so we're going to talk about confirmation.

And I recognize that some of you have been confirmed. So this is familiar territory for you. Others of you have no idea what I'm talking about. And maybe there are people here who are not Christians who are thinking of all the weeks.

[ 1 : 13 ] And this is not going to apply to me at all. But I hope to persuade you otherwise. Because talking about confirmation gives us an opportunity to clear up some of the popular misconceptions about the Christian faith.

Ideas like Christianity is simply one of many religious belief systems that we can choose to adopt. Ideas like Christianity is essentially a kind of fire insurance.

Or it's a list of do's and don'ts. And what I hope we'll see this morning is that Christianity is nothing less than an invitation that God extends to the world to become fully formed human beings.

And if we understand what confirmation is and what it means, I hope that we'll understand a little bit more about that truth.

That Christianity invites us to become fully formed human beings. So we're going to see three things about confirmation. We're going to see what it is. We're going to see what it means. And we're going to see why it matters.

[ 2 : 18 ] And in order to do that, we're going to be looking at 2 Peter 1, verses 3 to 11. And I hope the reasons for that will become clear. So let's pray and then we'll get started. Lord, we thank you for your word.

And we thank you that we have this opportunity to gather together on this beautiful Sunday morning in this beautiful space. And I thank you that we can sit at your feet and that you will be the God who fulfills your promise to be in our midst and to speak to us through your word.

And I pray that wherever we're coming from this morning, whatever might be distracting us or tugging at our minds, Lord, whatever may be causing stress or anxiety or despair, Lord, I pray that in some way your word would speak to all of us and tell us what we most need to hear from our Father.

We pray this in your Son's holy name. Amen. So first of all, we want to look at confirmation and simply ask the question, what is confirmation?

In the early church, when an adult came to faith in Jesus, that adult would then go through a three-year process of study and preparation.

[ 3 : 30 ] They would be given a sponsor and that sponsor would guide them through about a three-year process of preparing to be initiated into the church. And that was normally something that happened in secret because in the first few centuries of the Christian church, Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire.

So this is something that happened underground. And then after that three-year period, at the Easter vigil, which was held on Saturday night before Easter Sunday, new members would be formally welcomed into the church.

They would be formally initiated into the church. And there were three parts to that initiation. You had a baptism, a confirmation, and then a Eucharist.

And so first, these candidates would be baptized with water by priests and deacons. And then they would be confirmed by the bishop. The bishop would confirm the genuineness of their baptism and their faith, would anoint them with oil, and then would lay hands on them and pray that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And then they would all gather together and share in their first Eucharistic meal. And then as Christianity grew and spread, more and more entire families were converted.

[ 4 : 44 ] And in those cases, the entire family would be baptized, even the infants in the home, if there were any. And so gradually as Christianity grew and spread, and there were more and more churches, confirmation and baptism began to grow apart, and they became separate rites.

So they were originally part of the same thing, and they became separate. And so baptism would happen when somebody came to faith or when believers had children.

And then when the bishop would come to town, when the bishop would visit, they would confirm all the adults who had been baptized. And then they would also confirm all of the people who had been baptized as infants, and then had come to profess saving faith as they grew older.

And so they became two separate rites, but the essence of confirmation remained the same. And the essence is essentially this. It's the bishop who we consider to be the head pastor.

Right? So even though I'm the rector, the head pastor of our church is actually Bishop Steve Breedlove. So he's our chief pastor under Jesus Christ. And so the bishop confirms the genuineness of the faith and the genuineness of the baptism for all people who have come to faith and been baptized.

[ 6 : 01 ] And then he anoints them with oil, and then he lays his hands on them, and he prays that they would be filled with the Spirit. Now, we believe that when somebody comes to faith, they receive the Spirit.

We'll talk about that in a minute. So all the bishop does is pray for an increase. Right? There are times when Paul talks about believers who already have the Spirit, and he talks about them being filled with the Spirit, overtaken by the Spirit, so that it's overflowing and empowering them for ministry.

That's what the bishop does. So that's essentially what confirmation is. It's a time when the bishop visits and performs this rite for anyone desiring to be confirmed, which will happen next May.

So if that's what it is, I want to ask a little bit about what it means. Some traditions treat confirmation as a kind of graduation ceremony.

Right? So you're baptized as a baby. You grow up. You go through your confirmation classes around middle school, and then you get confirmed. It makes your parents happy. Maybe there's a party. And then from that point on, you stop going to church. Because it's like, I got confirmed.

[ 7 : 08 ] I'm done. Right? That's utterly wrong. And it completely misunderstands the point of confirmation. Confirmation is a one-time thing.

But the decision to be confirmed means that you're committing yourself to a life of maturity and service and love in Christ's name.

In many ways, your confirmation is like your ordination service. Right? It would be weird if we prepared somebody for ordination and then ordained them, and then they stopped going to church. That's probably not a good sign. Right? Well, same with confirmation. Right? And so when we look at what confirmation really means, if baptism marks the beginning of the Christian life, then confirmation is about the maturity and the mission that define the Christian life for the rest of your life.

So if baptism is about the beginning, confirmation is about the ongoing process of maturing for the sake of the mission that God has for you in the world.

[ 8 : 16 ] And that's why we're looking at 2 Peter chapter 1, because this is one of the best places to go to understand what Christian maturity is.

And it'll help us understand the meaning of confirmation. Because people is, Peter is writing to people who are already Christians, and they've already been baptized. And he says down in verse

10, therefore, brothers or brothers and sisters, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.

Now, he's not specifically talking about the right of confirmation. But even though he's not talking about that specifically, the meaning is exactly the same. So he's saying, number one, if you're a Christian, if you've been baptized, recognize what you've been given.

In verse 3, he says, his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. So anyone who comes to Jesus and asks, right, if you're here this morning, you're not a Christian, but you've been thinking about it for a while, and you feel like you want to give your life to Christ, all you have to do is to close your eyes and to pray, Jesus, I want to put my faith and my trust in you. I want to ask you to forgive my sin. I want to become a part of you and a part of your community. And I want to build my life on you. And if you say that to Jesus in that moment, you become a Christian.

[ 9 : 41 ] And God gives you everything in that moment that you need to build a life of godliness. Right? So in that moment, you receive the forgiveness and the grace of the gospel.

Right? That covers all of your sin, past, present, and future. In that moment, you receive the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. God puts his spirit in you. In that moment, you then recognize that God has given us the life-shaping power of his word.

And then ideally, from that moment on, you begin to benefit from the support and the encouragement of a church community. Right?

So Peter says, from the moment that you come to faith, God gives you everything you need, all the raw material. But then the real point of this chapter is Peter says, you need to recognize why God gave you all of that.

Like, why all of these resources? Why all of the promises? Why the power of the Holy Spirit? Why the power of the Holy Spirit? And he says in verse 5, for this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith.

[ 10 : 51 ] Now, that doesn't mean that your faith is missing anything. The word supplement can also be translated furnish. Right? So you have this faith. Now furnish it. Fill it out. Take the potential that you've been given and actualize it.

That's what he's talking about. God gave you all of this raw material so that you can build a new life with it, so that you can become a new person with it, so that you can become God's agent in the world.

So then that begs the question, how does this happen? What does Christian maturity actually look like? And Peter gives us this whole list of characteristics of the mature believer here in chapter 1, and he lists things like virtue and knowledge and self-control and steadfastness and so on.

Now, this list is not exhaustive. It's a fairly standard list of virtues, and it's not really meant to be followed in any particular order.

So some people make a big deal out of the order. I'm not convinced that we need to pay much attention to the order of these virtues. But it does show us a few things about Christian maturity. I just want to draw out three really quickly.

[ 12 : 02 ] So what is Christian maturity? Well, number one, this list shows us that Christian maturity means overcoming sinful desires. Overcoming sinful desires.

I was talking to somebody a couple of weeks ago, and she's about a year into addiction recovery. And she was just talking about how much had changed in her thinking over this last year of being in a 12-step program and trying to overcome addiction.

And she said, you know, the more I learn about addiction, the more I'm convinced that everybody has an addiction of one kind or another. Everybody's addicted to something.

Now, she's not a Christian, but I would say that that's fairly close to what the Bible says about the human condition. Verse 4 says that the world is essentially being destroyed by sinful desire.

And, you know, we hear the word sinful desire, and we think, like, desiring bad things. You know, we think of, like, porn, things like that. That's not what it's talking about. The word is epithumia, which essentially means an over-desire.

[ 13 : 11 ] Right? So a sinful desire is actually an over-desire. It's any desire that has become too strong. It becomes so strong that it begins to enslave us and to wreck our lives. And if you're anything like me, the biggest struggles that you deal with are not over-desiring bad things.

You know those are bad. It's over-desiring good things. It's things that we should desire that we just desire too much and out of order. Right?

So the Bible says our most fundamental problem is that we love the wrong things in the wrong order. I spend too much time on my phone because I would rather be numb than be present with my family.

I mean, if I just am honest, I don't have the emotional energy to engage, and so I would rather check out. I love feeling like I can escape more than I love grabbing those few minutes to be present with my kids.

Right? That's a desire that is out of order. It's out of whack. Right? We work too much because we love our jobs more than we love our health or our kids.

[14:24] We compromise our values because we love success more than we love integrity. You know, if you think about the things that you do in your life that you regret or feel ashamed of, you're always going to find an over-desire underneath those choices.

Right? We ignore people in need because we love convenience more than other human beings. You know, we give ourselves completely to someone for a night who then very predictably blows us off and stops returning our texts because we love feeling wanted, even for a little while, more than we love having self-respect.

We hook up with somebody and then ghost on them because we love physical gratification more than we love treating other people with dignity.

Right? So, look at the choices in your life. You will find underneath them over-desires. And whatever you think the worst problem in the world is, you know, racism, climate change, poverty, all of those issues exist because of over-desire.

Right? But somewhere underneath, there were people that loved the wrong things in the wrong order. And ultimately, the Bible says all of this is rooted in the fact, and this is Romans chapter 1, it's all rooted in the fact that we love the created things of the world more than the Creator.

[16:02] If you get that out of order, all of your other loves are going to be out of order. They're going to be disordered. They're going to be epithumia, desires. And so, Christian maturity is all about reordering our loves.

It's all about learning how to love God above all else and then having everything fall into place under Him. So, that's the first thing we see. Christian maturity is about overcoming sinful desires, reordering our loves.

The next thing that we see when we look at this virtue list is that Christian maturity requires intellectual and emotional maturity.

You cannot be mature as a Christian if you're not intellectually mature and if you're not emotionally mature. And I need to clarify what I mean by that. Every characteristic that Peter gives us requires one or both of these kinds of maturity.

Intellectual maturity, I don't mean you have to be super smart, get straight A's, you know, all of that stuff. That's not what I mean. Here's what I mean. For a long time now, most Christians in our culture have been more or less biblically and theologically illiterate.

[17:16] I mean, you can look at the studies, you can look at the statistics, but it's true. Most Christians in our culture for a long time now have been biblically and theologically illiterate.

And part of the reason comes from the fact that in the last century, as there was an increasing divide, perceived divide, between intellectual progressives and fundamentalists, among more conservative Christians, there was an increasing anti-intellectual bias.

Right? Also, there was an enormous focus on conversion, but not a lot of emphasis on catechesis and formation and Christian education.

And so as a result, we have multiple generations of Christians who have essentially never really experienced meaningful education or catechesis.

And so there's a great impoverishment when it comes to people's understanding of how to read the Bible and how to understand and root ourselves in the theological traditions that have shaped us over the centuries.

[18:19] And so that has cleared the way for all kinds of things, right? That biblical illiteracy and ignorance about church history cleared the way for many evangelicals to be co-opted by the political right.

It also cleared the way for many progressives to feel the freedom to begin to completely redefine and revise the Christian faith, to make it align with whatever cultural preferences hold sway in the moment.

Great example of that is the recent Evolving Faith Conference that just happened in Denver. It's just one iteration of the same tendency that we've seen again and again and again. And what we need to recognize is that mature Christians are people who are deeply rooted in Scripture.

They don't just defend the Bible, but they know how to read it. And they're deeply rooted in theology, and they're deeply rooted in history and in the traditions of the church so that on the one hand, a mature Christian is not going to be taken in by any political party ever because they can understand and articulate how the gospel critiques both sides of the aisle.

Also, mature Christians are going to be people who are never going to be so arrogant as to redefine Christianity because they understand that the purpose of the gospel is to conform the world to Christ, not to conform Christ to the world.

[ 19 : 52 ] And so, we need mature Christians who are intellectually mature. But we also need emotionally mature Christians. And this is maybe arguably a bigger problem in the church.

Now, when I say emotional maturity, what do I mean by that? Here's what I mean by emotional maturity. Being able to take responsibility for your life rather than blaming everything on other people or other systems or other institutions.

Being willing to accept that you cannot hold other people responsible for your emotional well-being. Accepting that. Being able to feel all of your feelings and to express them without being overwhelmed or driven by them.

Not just the good feelings, but the hard feelings. Knowing how to grieve. Knowing how to lament. Knowing how to be lonely. Knowing how to feel despair.

Knowing how to feel anger. You know, people with anger problems are not people that have too much anger. They're typically people who are terrified of their anger. They're typically people who grew up in homes where anger was hidden.

[ 21 : 09 ] And if you were angry, you were penalized. And so, they learned that anger was something to be afraid of and to deny and to stuff down. And so, they have no idea how to identify when they're getting angry.

And they have no idea how to even recognize it until it overwhelms them and it comes out in all kinds of harmful ways. So, anger management therapy is really about learning how to identify and express your anger long before it gets to that critical point.

Right? So, being able to do all of that is a part of emotional maturity. Another thing about emotional maturity is it means that you have self-control over your more base drives like hunger and lust.

You don't ever make decisions that are entirely driven by those things. That's one of the things that separates human beings from animals. You know, animals are entirely driven by drives like hunger and the desire for sexual reproduction.

Right? And so, all the decisions are kind of driven by that. Human beings have this whole additional brain on top of the animal brain that makes it possible for us to delay certain kinds of gratification.

[ 22 : 15 ] To pursue higher order goods. Right? Over lower order goods. And emotional maturity means being able to use that brain. Emotional maturity means being able to tolerate ambiguity in other people.

Right? It means being able to understand that a good person who is genuinely your friend and genuinely loves you will also sometimes hurt you and let you down.

And that doesn't mean that they're an evil person. It simply means that they're a person person. It simply means that they're a human being. And that it's okay for people to hurt you and let you down.

They're still good people and they still love you and they're still your friend. Emotional maturity means being able to understand that reality in relationships. Emotional maturity means being able to forgive well.

Not minimizing the hurt. Not shortcutting the grief over the pain that was caused. But also not harboring resentment and holding grudges. That's emotional maturity.

[ 23 : 19 ] Emotional maturity means knowing how to have healthy intimacy. Not losing yourself in another person so that you don't know who you are anymore. But not walling off other people.

Knowing how to have that healthy exchange of hearts and souls. Emotional maturity means being able to receive criticism without becoming overly defensive.

It means that you can walk away from that conversation and sift out what you need to hear. And then let go of the rest. Right? So it means knowing how to apologize when you need to apologize. But equally importantly, not apologizing when you don't need to apologize. Emotional maturity means the ability to take care of yourself. And to set healthy boundaries. Knowing how far to let people in. Knowing that some people should be let in further than other people. Knowing that some things you need to sacrificially say yes to. And other things you need to actually say no to.

[ 24 : 22 ] Understanding that Jesus wasn't actually selfless. Jesus had a strong sense of self. Jesus had a strong sense of boundary.

There's a huge difference between being selfless and being self-sacrificing. And emotional maturity understands the difference. Right? So all of this constitutes emotional maturity.

But here's the thing about emotional maturity. It is not automatic. When you give your life to Christ, you're given the raw material. But you're still you. I'm still me.

And here's the thing. It can only be developed with a lot of time. And a lot of hard work. And a lot of suffering.

It is the kind of thing that is only found on the far side of suffering. A lot of suffering. Right? It's emotional maturity is the kind of thing that is called out in you.

[ 25 : 21 ] When you confront a situation and it's brutal and awful and it overwhelms you. And you're like, I cannot deal with this. And then you rise to the occasion, you've become a little more mature. The problem is our culture is so averse to suffering.

And so focused on protecting people from negative feelings. And insulating people from contradictory opinions. That our culture is much more likely to infantilize than to promote emotional maturity.

The church has to be different. I don't know many other institutions that are. The church has to be a place where we are cultivating emotional maturity. Where we are doing the hard work of growing into emotionally mature disciples.

And here's the thing. That means when things get hard in your life. That means when you get hurt or offended. There are a lot of people here with very different opinions.

About lots of things. When you look around you. There are people from every stripe in this room. Especially when it comes to politics. But when things get hard.

[ 26 : 34 ] Or when you get hurt or offended. Or when somebody says something that you strongly disagree with. Or your issues get exposed. What this means is you don't run away. It means you don't cut and run and go to some other community.

Where nobody knows you. And you can be safely anonymous. It means you face it. It means you hang in there. And it means you thank God because the only way you're going to grow is if you suffer.

And so thank God I have to face this horrible situation. God loves me so much. He loves me so much. That he has put me into this situation.

So that I can become more the kind of person he's calling me to be. That's a weird way to think about suffering. But I think it makes a little more sense of the suffering of Jesus that we see. If it was necessary for him.

Maybe it's necessary for us. We're not called to be disciples who remain infants. Right? We're called to be childlike.

[ 27 : 32 ] Not childish. And you can't be a spiritual giant if you're an emotional infant. So that's emotional maturity. So we need both. We need intellectual maturity. We also need emotional maturity.

And then the third thing that we see about Christian maturity is that it expresses itself in love. That the ultimate end of Christian maturity is love. Love for God. Love for other people.

And specifically the word doesn't connote love for other Christians. But the ultimate end of this list of virtues is agape love. It's love for everybody. It's love for our enemies.

It's love for people who disagree with us. It's love for people who believe all kinds of things different from us. That's the ultimate end of Christian maturity. If that's not the fruit being produced in your life, you're on the wrong road.

Right? Verse 7 shows us that all of this culminates in love. And so Christian maturity is this lifelong process of reordering our desires, of developing spiritual and intellectual and emotional maturity,

and of learning to love God and other people fully and unconditionally.

[ 28 : 39 ] So when we talk about becoming fully formed human beings, that's what we mean. Right? That's what a fully formed human being looks like. So that's what confirmation is.

That's why, that's a bit about what it means in terms of maturing for mission. I just want to say a couple of things here at the end about why confirmation matters.

Because confirmation, unlike baptism and the Eucharist, confirmation is not something that Jesus explicitly commands his church to do. We see it happening since the very first days of the early church.

And so it's an extremely important tradition. And it was a rite that emerged out of the early church leaders' reading of Scripture and how conversion happened and how people were welcomed into the church.

And so it has a biblical foundation. But unlike the Eucharist, unlike baptism, it's not explicitly commanded by Jesus, what we would call a dominical sacrament.

[ 29 : 37 ] So why would we do confirmation? And I want to give you a couple of things to think about with this. Number one, I think it's very important for our church in particular because it reaffirms the importance of Christian community.

It reaffirms the importance of Christian community. You know, in the postmodern West, we have a highly individualistic approach to faith. And you see this in a lot of churches.

You know, faith is about me deciding in a vacuum that based on the information, I'm going to choose to adopt this Christian belief system.

And then it's really about my one-on-one relationship with Jesus. And more and more, there's this sense that I might actually find that better apart from a church community, that the kind of purest form of relationship is just between me and Jesus.

I just, we need to understand how fundamentally incompatible that is with the way the early church thought about the faith. In the early church, for centuries, conversion involved both the individual, I decide to put my faith in Jesus, but it also involved the community every bit as much.

[ 30 : 51 ] You know, it was the community's job to say, we affirm that your faith is genuine. We affirm that what you're claiming to believe is actually Christianity and not something else.

And we affirm the genuineness of your faith, and we decide to welcome you into our community. And there were two roles, right?

The role of the individual and the role of the community. And the Christian community played a vital role not only in initiating people, but they passed on the core teachings of the faith.

And they supported new converts as they began to adopt an entirely new way of life in a world that was largely hostile toward them and their beliefs. So simply put, when you get confirmed, you're essentially saying to your church community, I've realized I can't do this alone.

I need a community supporting me to live the life of faith that Jesus has called me to live. And this is partly why we're talking about this on All Saints Sunday.

[ 31 : 57 ] You know, because being confirmed is a way for you to identify with the church. Not just the church universal, but the church that you're a part of, right? Church of the Advent, the Anglican Church, right?

You're identifying yourself with a public body, a community that's going to support you and uphold you in your faith. So it's an opportunity to publicly confess your faith in Jesus. It's an opportunity to publicly commit yourself or recommit yourself to the baptismal promises that you made or the baptismal promises that were made on your behalf.

So in a little while, Caitlin and Chase are going to come up, and we're going to baptize Mara. And they're going to baptize Mara, and they're going to make promises.

But the hope is that one day anybody who's baptized can affirm those promises for themselves.

Right? And then also it's an opportunity to be publicly commissioned for a spirit-filled life of love and service.

So it reaffirms the importance of Christian community in our lives. And number two, the last thing I'll say about it, it reaffirms our commitment to maturity and mission in the Christian life.

[ 33 : 14 ] You know, this isn't just about growth for our own sake. It's about becoming people who love and serve others in God's name. It's about becoming the kind of people not only that God desires to see, but it's about becoming the kind of people that the world needs.

And we want Advent to be a place where we take seriously the call to grow in our faith so that we will overflow with love for God and His world.

And, you know, this is what we see made most clear in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who in every way became like us so that one day we might become like Him.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank You. We thank You that even as we talk about our role in maturity and growing, that ultimately this is something that is dependent upon You working in us, we pray for You to kindle the Holy Spirit in us, in our hearts.

We pray that these are things that we would long for. Lord, I know how much I desire to love, and I know how hard it is.

[ 34 : 28 ] And, Lord, I pray that You would, through a movement of the Holy Spirit, kindle in us a desire to grow so that we might become better lovers of You and of those whom You've created who bear Your image in the world.

Lord, we pray this not only for our good and the good of our community, but also for Your glory, Lord, that You might be glorified in the way that You can transform human beings to be more like You.

We pray this in Your Son's holy name. Amen.