

Confirmation Sunday

May 19, 2019

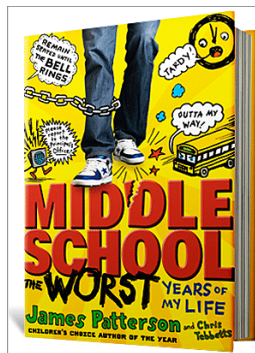
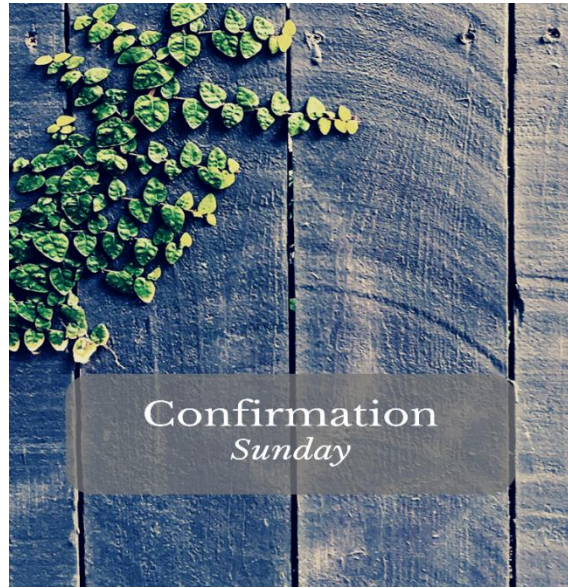
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Deuteronomy 6: 4-9

John 15: 1-11

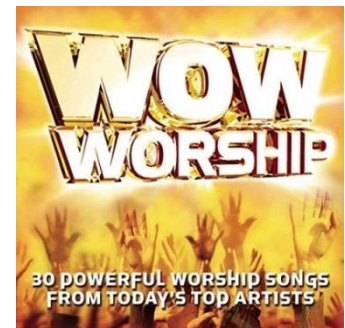
What Comes Next?



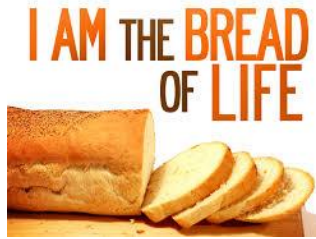
Adulthood is a fine thing. You have your life in order (or so we make people think). You know who you are (or so we make people think). But we weren't always so nicely put together, there was a time we all endured preteen-hood! There are literally books and movies about this being the worst years of your life.

If I ever was to doubt God's plans for my life, I should just take a walk down memory lane at eight to 13 year old me. While most people my age enjoyed listening to the Top 40 Hits in

the car, I was jamming to the WOW Worship CD, yellow edition. I had all the lyrics memorized and the order of songs on the track. I would shout to my mom, NUMBER 4 "I CAN ONLY IMAGINE, AMY GRANT" and then I'd say skip to NUMBER 9, "FOREVER, CHRIS TOMLIN"! And I would have my own American Idol moment singing these top worship hits. I would ride in the car with my friends and be confused as to why they listened to regular music in the car and not the WOW CD. God surely did have a plan set for me, because here I am twenty years later working for the church and leading God's people on Confirmation Sunday.



Our Scripture reading comes from the Gospel of John, and what I think is most fascinating and unique about Jesus in John's Gospel are the I AM statements. When someone says, "I am..." it reveals something about their identity, about the core of their being; about what is most important to them or about them. For example, when I say, "I am a Christian," I'm making a big, bold statement that my identity in Christ is what's most important to me. So when Jesus says, "I am..." we should pay close attention. He's pulling back the curtain on his glorious character. He's telling us something profoundly important – something we don't want to miss. While making this statement, he is also making a promise to all of us. With that in mind, let's spend some time savoring Jesus' "I AM" statements.



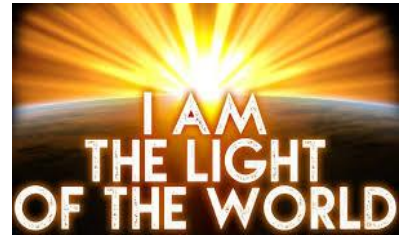
First, we hear Jesus proclaim to the crowd

"I am the bread of life,"

promising that we will never go hungry and never be thirsty, for Christ will sustain us. Then we hear the popular,

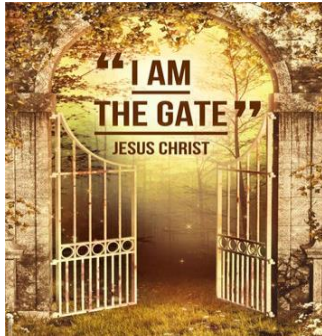
"I am the light of the world,"

promising all believers that we will never have to walk in darkness and will have a light to guide our life. I am a particular fan of the third statement,



"I am the gate"

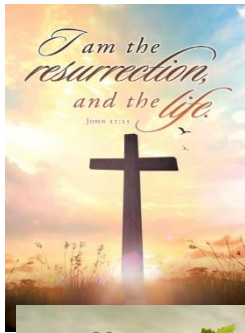
in which Christ promises us that we are invited in but that gate also leads out, so no matter where you are on your faith journey, there will always be an open gate to Christ.



Then we hear Jesus say,

"I am the good shepherd,"

promising to lay down his life for the sheep, giving them eternal life and protecting them from harm.

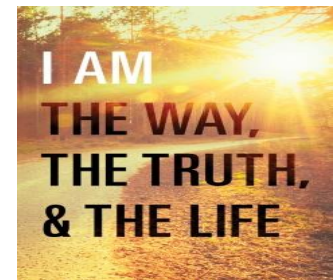


The next two are the most memorable I AM statements;

"I am the resurrection and the life,"

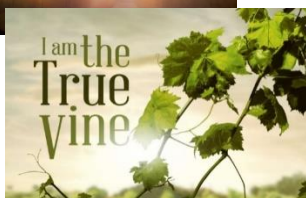
"I am the way, the truth, and the life."

Christ promises us that we will live an eternal life through him, and that is how we will come to know His Father.



So today we come to our final passage,

"I am the true vine."



Listen for the word of the Lord from John chapter 15, verses 1-11:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

This is the word of the lord.

Thanks be to God.

If I were to ask, “Who’s Beyoncé?” Most of you would say she’s a famous pop singer. And that would be correct. But would it answer my question? No, because being a famous pop singer isn’t just who Beyoncé is – it is a part of her. If the totality of Beyoncé’s identity is found in being a famous pop singer, then who is she to her children? Who is she to her parents?



Who we are isn’t defined by our career, or our successes, fears, or failures. Our identity is so much more than these things. In today’s lesson we learn the most vital truth in the faith: our identity in Christ - Who am I in light of who He is and has done.



“What is this?” It’s a light bulb. That’s its identity. That’s what it is. What does a light bulb do? It shines light. A light bulb was made for one purpose – to be plugged into an electrical socket, to glow with light. How do we know this is a light bulb and this is its purpose? It has either been taught to us or we have observed it working as designed.

But if I were to take this light bulb back in a time machine 2000 years and hand it to the emperor of Rome, would he know what it is or what to do with it? NO! He wouldn’t have a clue. Why? There was no knowledge of electricity at the time. He would have no way of discovering its identity or potential. Would it change the fact that it’s still a light bulb? No. But it would never function as a light bulb until its identity is discovered. Caesar may love this light bulb and use it in different ways. He may treat it as a god and build a shrine to worship it. But the average person living today would laugh at his ignorance.

Just like this light bulb, we were created with an identity and for a purpose. But unless we know our true identity, we’ll be just like Caesar with a light bulb – possessing but not understanding.

How do we discover who we are and what we were designed to do? We go to our Designer and ask Him. Just like the inventor of the light bulb gets to determine the purpose of the light bulb, so too, God has determined who we are and how we function. And God has already revealed to us our design/purpose, in the Word. We are called to be branches of the vine, connected to Christ and to abide in him. Now this past week I talked with our Wednesday Bible Study about this word “abide.” It’s not commonly used today in our everyday language, and so I started a word-search, and the best replacement of “abide” would be “remain.” So let’s rephrase a sentence from our text:

If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Well that holds a lot more significance. So now it's clearer, we are called to remain in Christ, and Christ's word will remain in us. But let's take that word-search one step farther. Abide also means to find a habitual dwelling place...so find your home.

If you live in me, and my words live in you, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

See that gives a stronger connection to the text. We are called to LIVE in Christ. But if I were to ask you the simple question, where do you live? I don't think your first response would be "in Christ." And if I followed up with that question, is your apparent faithfulness to God producing fruits for God? Would you be able to say yes?

These are the demands of God. We are called to live in Christ and bear fruit in response.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. (John 15:1-2)

It's not enough to be faithful; we must be fruitful. Faithfulness without fruitfulness is only half of the call. You've seen these commercials I'm sure of jobs of importance being half done. Well God doesn't want you're faithfulness to be half done.

Be fruitful; that's the essence of praise, and proof of discipleship.

Being fruitful means to reproduce the nature of God here on earth. It means to produce results that make folks pause and say, "Hey! There's God!"

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"

It means that your life on earth makes people stop and wonder. The evidence of Christ in a believer is seen in the fruits he or she bears.

Today our Confirmands will make their promise to reaffirm their baptismal vows in front of the congregation and you as a congregation will promise to nurture and guide them on their journeys of faith. These 41 youth have spent 38 weeks devoted to the teachings of the Presbyterian Church, the call God has in each of their lives and the bond they have made together. They learned that as a Christian you cannot just be a branch hanging on the vine by yourself, but you must be surrounded by many branches. These are unique, a little wild, but bold Christians of faith promising their commitment to this church. And as I shared with them on Wednesday night, as they were passed by the members of Session in membership, today is not a graduation service. Their faith journey doesn't end or stop growing here. Today is a commitment to continue seeking God and living in Christ.

And so what comes next? Well now they get to choose the direction of their journey. We have provided the foundation for them to grow and discover what works in their growing relationship with God. Maybe they'll join a Bible study or become confirmation teachers!

But the final thing I'll ask them and all of you...where do you live?