**Graduating Confirmation**

Based on [John 15:9-17](http://www.esvbible.org/search/John+15%3A9-17/)

Preached on May 13, 2012

Easter 6 - Confirmation Sunday

By Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

**“Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.”**

Today is confirmation Sunday, and every year I make the same mistake. Sometime or another I will catch myself talking about “graduating” from confirmation. Confirmation is not supposed to be a graduation, as if you receive your diploma and now you’re done studying. The sad thing is, that’s what graduation has become, just a hoop you jump through to get a piece of paper. Graduation today has a sense of finality, I’ve learned what I had to, now I’m free to pursue my own goals and achievements.

But that’s not what the word means,”Graduation.” Graduation literally means that you have completed one step, and now moving on to “the next step up.” Confirmation is not a check box on your bucket list, “been there, done that, moving on…” Confirmation is a graduation in the sense that it is a step up from infancy to maturity in Christ; it’s a step up from milk to solid food in His Teaching.

In today’s gospel lesson, Jesus is saying goodbye to his disciples, his own “confirmation class.” He knows that, in a matter of hours, he will be arrested by people who don’t like him, whipped by soldiers who don’t know him, and crucified by people who “know not what they do,” and though he will be raised on the third day, he will ultimately ascend to heaven, leaving his disciples to carry on without him.They will always be his students, but they will have many oppourtinities to teach on his behalf and they need to be ready.

His disciples will have to take that next step. And what advice does the creator of the universe have to say to his motley crew of confused disciples? What words does Jesus use to sum up three years of teaching confirmation to his followers? Is it the usual graduation ceremony platitudes: “Follow your heart?” Pursue your Dreams?” “Achieve your goals?” “Believe in yourself?”

None of that. He isn’t the valedictorian of a graduating class. Jesus isn’t the keynote speaker at some self-esteem workshop. He doesn’t care too much about Peter’s sense of self-worth, or James’ free-ride football scholarship, or with John’s passion for the plight of the spotted owl. Jesus teachings are pretty useless to anyone who’s only interested in achieving their own goals and ambitions. HE is the one who will lay his own head on the chopping block for the sins of the world, and he’s not one for empty sentimentality and vague words of encouragement.

Still, he does have advice and a mission for his students, and before he lays down his life for the life of the world he has this to say to the ones he will send out in His name. He says, “**Abide in my love**”. **Abide in my love**. And, in case the advice is not practical enough for them…He has this plan for success. He says, **“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love**.” Not, if you follow your heart, or your dreams, you will abide in my love…No. “**If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love**.”

Commandments might make you think of the 10 “thou shalt nots”, or a list of rules for polite behavior and holy living. But commandments is really just another word for teachings. And teachings are things that don’t come from our heart, or our dreams. That’s kind of the point isn’t it? Teachings are unnatural…if they were natural, they wouldn’t need to be taught. Teachings are things that we are supposed to learn. They are lessons that are meant to change you into what you ought to be. Jesus came to change hearts and minds with his teaching.

And what is that teaching? His Word in the bible? Yes. But unless you have a way better filing system upstairs than I do, you’re not likely to have the whole bible in your head, ready to access at a moment’s notice, ready to compute with what you experience every moment of every day.

That’s why we have catechisms and creeds and confirmation. That’s why it’s traditional to memorize the Apostle’s creed and have it ready in your head and your heart at a moments notice.

Now some people will say that memorizing creeds doesn’t matter…what matters is what’s in your heart. Some will say that, all of that complicated church talk is a distraction, a stick in the mud, and all that really matters is that you love Jesus. That’s true. All that matters is loving Jesus. But here’s the thing…you love him by keeping his commandments, *holding on to his teachings* like they are a family heirloom, and sharing them like a meal, and living them like adventure.

Consider something for a moment. Have you ever, in, you’re whole life, heard somebody say, “**It doesn’t matter what you eat, so long as you care about your health.**” Of course not. But we live in a world where it’s popular for Christians to say, “**It doesn’t matter what your church teaches, so long as you love Jesus.**” Silly isn’t it, when you think about it. Eating the right things is precisely *how* you care about your health. // And so too, following the *right* teaching is precisely how you love Jesus. **If you keep my commands, you will abide in my love**.”

Many good things are lost by sheer neglect or lack of attention. Hold a plate by two fingers, then let it drop. It will shatter on the floor. You didn’t really break it, you just let the plate go, and it broke itself. So it is with friendship, ideals, character, health, and … faith. You quickly lose them if you neglect them and let them go.

Therefore Ladies and Gentlemen, and especially you confirmands today…hold on to what you have been taught. The faith that has been unpacked from the treasury of the Holy Scriptures and delivered to you in the form of catechesis and instruction, are like so much fine china.

What you were taught in your confirmation, in the catechism, are the dishes which help you handle and hold the Word of Truth, and serve it to others. Teachings on law and gospel, sin and grace, word and sacrament, creeds and bible verses. So hold on to them, don’t slacken your grip because this is your chance to speak meaningfully, articulately, maturely about the faith that is in you.

And really, what else is more important to talk about, than the faith that is in you. What is more important to share than the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He is your life’s ambition and goal; He is your hope and your dream and your heart’s desire; and if you’re gonna make a difference in this life that matters, it will only be in Him and through Him. He is, after all, the one who took your sins to bear on the cross, so that, on the last day, you will be *confirmed* as one who’s sins have been removed, and in that glorious heavenly ceremony—*graduate* once and for all to eternal life.