

*Reception of Confirmands and additional New Members:*

It is fitting that you join with this particular congregation on this particular Sunday. Pentecost Sunday. The day we remember the gift of the Spirit creating the church from a rag-tag group of disciples of Jesus.

In joining together today it is fitting to remember that the disciples of Jesus have always been imperfect, broken people, gluing their lives back together through the power of the Spirit of God and the gift of community. Do not ever forget that these ‘prototype’ disciples fled from Jesus in his darkest hour. That they, too, succumbed to the temptation to flee from it all when times are as tough as they can be.

But now, on this Sunday, in these Scriptures, by the mysterious power of the risen Christ, they have glued themselves back together as a community. And now, on this Sunday, in these Scriptures, by the power of the Spirit of God, they find a way to translate their experience to a whole new group of people.

And the community grows.

And grows.

And grows ...

Right on up to this moment. As you join this congregation on this Pentecost Sunday.

So, what is it, in fact, you are doing, as you join this congregation?

This is the question we have been asking in our Confirmation Class. And the answers to that question are as varied as we church members, ourselves.

We join for a lot of reasons, I think.

I was twelve years old when I officially joined the church as a confirmand. And, quite frankly, I honestly do not remember knowing I had the choice *not* to join! It was just what we did. And so I did it.

But here at First United we make it very clear to our confirmands that this is their choice. And that there is no judgment either way. And so we have been talking about it, wondering about it.

Why do people join the church?

Some people join because they want to know more about Jesus. Some people join because this place is a lifeline for them through times of trouble. Some people join because they care about our social justice mission or because they want to be part of a congregation that is open and affirming of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender persons. Some people join because they want to be part of a denomination that ordains women. Some people join because church helps them be a better person.

Some people join because the church is just plain where their friends are.

Of course there are many people who choose not to join the church. Maybe because they find it hard to believe some of the teachings about God or Jesus. Maybe because they see that we in the church do not always act in a loving way. Maybe because they would rather sleep in on a Sunday morning or go hiking in the Adirondacks!

(And on a gorgeous day like today I’m not sure I could blame them!)

The truth is, we do not always know why people choose to join the church or not.

And if I am honest about my own journey of faith, I am not even sure I always know the reasons why *I* have joined the church – and stayed with the church – throughout the different seasons of my life.

And from what I have heard from so many of the folks here at First United, it appears I am not alone in that.

Sometimes we know why we are here. And sometimes we are just here and do not really know why. But we keep coming back. Something keeps drawing us back. And maybe that is good enough.

And while that may sound like a disingenuous response to the question – ‘What does it mean to join the church?’ – I cannot help but think that the apostles in our Scripture lesson for the day are in the exact boat.

They first join the ‘church’ when Jesus picks them up from a fishing expedition along the Sea of Galilee. And they think they are joining a movement to save the world.

And in a way they are ...

But that movement turns out to be very different than the one they had in mind when they said ‘yes’ to the whole adventure. And when Jesus dies they are ready to chuck it all and go back home to their fishing nets.

But something has happened to them along the way that they just cannot shake.

In their time with Jesus they have known a moment of grace. A glimmer of hope. An experience of the Holy. A connection with God and with one another that flat out refuses break. And they find out, when all is said and done, that they really cannot walk away from that ‘something.’ That they have to keep that ‘something’ going.

And so they do, throughout the Season of Easter, eating and drinking and sharing their stories with the risen Christ.

And *then* they find out, on this Pentecost Sunday, that the Spirit empowers them to share that ‘something’ with anyone with ears to hear. And then they find out that when they ‘step out on faith,’ like they do on this Pentecost Sunday, the Spirit of God gives them the words to share this moment of grace, this glimmer of hope, this experience of connection, this ‘something,’ with everyone else they meet.

And so they just keep on ‘stepping out.’ And they just keep on ‘speaking up.’ And they just keep on sharing this ‘special something’ they have known through the ministry of Jesus.

And they do not stop until they have spread this ‘special something’ about the ministry of Jesus ‘to the ends of the earth.’ To the point that you and I and all of these people gathered here now have a chance to be part of it, too.

And we are grateful.

So what does it really mean to join the church?

The answers to that question are as varied as we church members ourselves.

But I think it must have something to do with that ‘something’ we can experience, even if we cannot always find the words for it. And I think the Spirit really does give us the ability to share it with everyone we meet, even when our words for it fail.

So welcome home dear friends, beautiful beloved children of God, to that ‘special something’ we find together here in the church. And help us to continue to share it with one another.

I pray it may be so.

Amen.