

May 20, 2018

*"Confirmation 2018"*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Acts 2:1-13

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I read something this past week that disturbed me for two reasons. It seems that a Massachusetts preschool has banned children from using the term "best friend." Parent Christine Hartwell, says she learned about the ban from her four-year-old daughter who came home sad from the Pentucket Workshop Preschool. When the Hartwell's complained, school officials explained that the term "best friend" can make other children feel excluded.

Now we all know that best friends are important to us. In fact, I'm willing to bet that every one of us either has a best friend, or has had, a best friend at one time or another. For many of you, that person is your spouse. Or maybe it's a parent or brother or sister. Or it's another person that you have such a special affinity toward that he or she can be described in no other way but by the term "best friend." Because a "best friend" is someone that you trust so much, you're able to share all your feelings, your struggles, your lives. It's someone that, not only has your best interests at heart, but someone who would do anything for you. So the first reason this story bothered me is relatively simple. And that is, I think this is a case of political correctness gone way awry. It's another example of outside forces telling us how to think, how to act, and telling us who we should and shouldn't be. And that's not right! The fact is that God made us to be in fellowship with one another, and to enjoy special relationships. Just look in the Bible – King David and Jonathan shared a friendship where Jonathan "loved David as his own soul." Ruth and Naomi were friends that refused to leave one another. And even Jesus had an "inner circle" of three best friends among the disciples - Peter, James and John.. And so, if you have a "best friend" at either four years old, or ninety years old, then so be it – enjoy it! And don't let anyone tell you differently!

Now my second reason is a bit more complex. Psychologists tell us that we are all social beings that yearn to be accepted and be part of a group that is something greater than ourselves. Whether it's family, friends, co-workers, a church, or something else, people have the emotional need and desire to belong. But look at what's happened in today's society. The family unit is no longer intact for any number of reasons. More and more people are just too busy to develop deep friendships. More and more people are working from home. Church and religion is no longer in vogue. And social media use, which is rampant today in America is, in and of itself, isolating. As one person said, "I could have 1,000 or

10,000 friends on Facebook, but it's only the meaningful 'in person' relationships that I have with other people that actually keep me from becoming lonely." And I just read in *The Week* magazine, that loneliness is at epidemic levels in the United States, and could rank alongside smoking and obesity as a major threat to public health. In a survey of 20,000 adults conducted by the health insurance company CIGNA, nearly 50% of people said they felt alone or left out. While loneliness is often associated with aging, the survey found that the worst affected group, were, in fact, young people between the ages 18 and 22.

So how does all this apply to my sermon? Well today, we are welcoming seven young people into full membership in this body of Christ known as the John Wesley United Methodist Church. And here is where they do belong. Let me introduce our confirmands. Devyn, Karlee, Maia, Moriah, Sean, Sonjia, Tiana. And it is my greatest hope that these young men and women will experience our church as a different place than what's out there in the world, as a special place, a community that reflects the fellowship and acceptance of our Lord Jesus Christ who sat at the table with all - saint and sinner alike, and went out of his way to accept and befriend all people. I hope these confirmands will experience church as a place where they know they are loved by God and loved by you.

And, where they will be reminded who their true, forever best friend is – Jesus. Yes, I want them to experience this church as a place where they know that they are children of God, and that is their most important identity. A place where they will never feel excluded. A place where they will find a caring community that they can turn to when they need help. Where they will find people to share their joys and sorrows, and where there are people who will pray for them when they cannot pray for themselves. And where, when the hard times come, as they inevitably will, there will be others to help share their burden. And above all, I hope they find John Wesley to be a place where the worship of God is primary.

Because you see, that's the kind of church that started after Pentecost. We heard about it in today's scripture. The author of Acts, St. Luke, gives us a picture of this church. It's a picture of a church worshipping together, welcoming all who would be part of it, a people learning together, praying for and caring for one another, and manifesting a spirit of generosity. A community alive with the presence of God, the good news of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Yes, it is my hope that John Wesley will be a place where they will continue learning to be, as St. Paul said, "in the world, but not of

the world.” And given all that we see happening in the world today, shouldn't we want to encourage and support these young people on their faith journey. And so to help them get started, I want to share a letter that each of them will receive. A letter from their very "best friend." And although it was written to them, it is really something for all of us. So listen as if it was written to you as well.

May 20, 2018

Dear Confirmands (and Congregation)

What a great day this is! You have claimed our family name – the name of Christ. You have publicly stated you want to be Christians and follow me, as part of the John Wesley United Methodist Church. I have so many wonderful things planned for you. But be patient. All that I want to tell you and show you will take a lifetime – your lifetime. And as we begin, there are a few things I want you to keep in mind. And in case you lose this letter, most of it (the part you see in italics) can be found in your Bible.

First, know that you are very special. I created you uniquely, with your own gifts and talents - you are mine. *See how great a love I have for you that you should be called my child, for this is what you are. I formed your inward parts. I knit you together in your mother's womb. I know the number of hairs on your head. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. You are precious in my sight and I love you.*

And because I love you, I want to give you all the best. *Call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you. I know all that you need. Just seek me first, and all these things will be given to you.*

There will be times in your life when you start to worry or feel anxious about something. But I tell you, *Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything, with prayer and thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to me. Trust in me with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. I cause all things to work together for good to those who love me, and who follow my path.*

Contrary to what some may say, it is not difficult to live the Christian life. It is simple, for it is a life of love. *Love me with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might, and love your neighbor as yourself. Do not judge and you will not be judged, do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way. Love one another, just as I have loved you.*

You will make mistakes sometimes, I know that. *All have sinned and fallen short of my glory. But if you confess your sins, I will forgive you. As far as the east is from the west, so will I remove your sins from you. However, there is a requirement. If you forgive others, I will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, I will not forgive you.*

Throughout your life, people will tempt you to put your hope and trust in things of this world. They will claim that money, possessions, status and good looks will bring you happiness. But this isn't true. *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in or steal. For what shall it profit you to gain the whole world, and forfeit your soul?*

I want life to be an exciting adventure for you. I've already given you a beautiful earth, special talents, parents, grandparents and a church family who are loving and supportive. And I am excited for your decision today. *For I know the plans I have for you. Plans for good and not evil, to give you a future and a hope. Don't let your heart be troubled or afraid. Be strong and courageous. And remember, I am with you every step of the way.*

I love you,

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.