

3/12/25 Lenten Reflection

From Affirmation of Baptism - Affirmation in the presence of the Assembly

You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

- To live among God's faithful people,
- To hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
- To proclaim the good news of God In Christ through work and deed,
- To serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
- And to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

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If your friends jumped off a bridge, would you? Studies say yes, yes you would. We all know that the people around us influence what we wear, the shows we watch, and the music we listen to, and we constantly remind teenagers of the dangers of peer pressure, but societal influence is so much more than that. It affects every aspect of our lives. In numerous social experiments performed over the last 75 years, scientists have proven that you will wait in a line, stand up at the sound of a beep, give the wrong answer, and even inflict pain – just because other people are doing it. The impact that the people around you have on your life, your choices, and your behavior can't be overstated, and this influence extends to our spiritual lives as well. Luckily, the influence of your peers won't just lead you down a dark road of bad choices that ends with you jumping off the proverbial bridge. As King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 27:17, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Surrounding yourself with the right group of people can help you improve your grades, make healthier eating and fitness choices, reduce gossiping and bigotry, and improve your overall quality of life. Basically, spending time with the wrong people can influence you to make bad choices while spending time with the right people can influence you to make good choices. Because of this, it should be no surprise that when you go through Affirmation of Baptism, or Confirmation, you're asked if you intend to continue to live among God's faithful people. People who share your beliefs, who will encourage you to treat others with love and kindness, and who will support you on your journey to follow Jesus. In verses throughout the Bible, we're reminded to:
Gather regularly and support each other, (*Hebrews 10:24-25*)
Carry each other's burdens, (*Galatians 6:2*)
Encourage one another and build each other up. (*1 Thessalonians 5:11*)

I see the positive impact that living in that kind of faith community has right here in our own congregation. Preschoolers influence one another to clean up at Sunday School and participate in Little Ringers. A couple of well-behaved, focused Sunday School kids can calm a whole group down. Youth will happily serve communion, usher, teach Sunday School or help at VBS...as long as their friends are doing it.

Around the office we literally argue about who's going to help the most if someone is sick or has time off. Gary Johnson has Confirmation kids competing to memorize Bible verses. Because of Jane Hansen, we all make a point to follow best practices in the kitchen and do, "what we can while we can". And don't even get me started on Norma and Judy ...though those two are just as likely to get you into trouble, so be careful there. I could keep naming names, because all of you contribute and have a positive effect on the people around you. The impact that choosing to live among God's faithful people, our faith community, has had on my life has been astounding. I was probably a member here for a good seven years before anybody even knew my name because I wouldn't talk to anyone. With your love and support, my faith, and my willingness to share that faith, has grown exponentially.

Your kindness and encouragement helps me to be the silly, bouncy, loving, whack-a-doodle person that God made me to be. That's what living a faith community does. God wants that same love, support and encouragement for all of you.

Now, you may be thinking to yourself, "Jenna...we're already doing it. We're here on a Wednesday night, hanging out with our church friends, listening to you babble...what more do you want?" You did all make the choice to be here tonight – thank you – but it's not just about one night, or one season. It's a choice you make every day; especially when you enter a new chapter in your life.

Our 8th graders will be confirmed in about 6 weeks. They'll be making the commitment to live among God's faithful people as one of five promises during the Rite of Affirmation of Baptism. For some of you, 8th graders, that means mom and dad won't be forcing you to come to church every week anymore. What will YOU choose to do.

Then soon you'll be off to college or living on your own. Your choices about how to spend your Sundays and Wednesdays will be COMPLETELY your own. Will you find your own faith community?

And parents of kids being confirmed or going off to college...now that you don't have to bring the kids to Sunday School or Confirmation every week, what will YOU choose to do? Will you choose to stay an active part of your faith community or will you fall away from it?

65 and older - you're not off the hook. Snowbirds have choices too. Will you try to stay involved with us here at CCLC by watching online, will you find a new church home at your winter destination, or will the lure of the golf course on a warm Sunday morning be too much to resist?

Real life can be a dark and scary place. It's too hard to go through it alone and it's harder still if you're surrounded by people who don't have your best interests at heart. Make the easier choice and choose to live among God's faithful people. Be surrounded by people who love you and support you and will encourage you on your journey to follow Jesus. **Amen.**