

“Firmly Rooted”

The Day of Pentecost/Confirmation Day

Acts 2:1-21

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:4a

When prospective members wish to become new, full-fledged members of Atonement Lutheran and are not familiar with the teachings of the Lutheran Church, I will first engage them in a period of instruction in Luther’s *Small Catechism*. I also give them a copy of this book: *Rooted in the Faith—Preparation for Church Membership* by Dr. Charles Arand. I give these new members a copy of this book and then together we read and discuss its introduction. I do this because through the use of an analogy, the author paints a helpful picture and image of the Christian Faith in the introductory pages.

On this Confirmation Day I would like to take some time to consider this analogy with you all, particularly with our confirmands. I would like to reflect on the beautiful image of the Christian life that is presented with this analogy. The goal of such a reflection is that we can believe more firmly that we are safely rooted in Christ. And that being rooted firmly in Christ we continually receive the spiritual nourishment and growth that God gives through his Spirit in the Gospel nutrients of the Word and the Sacraments. Filled with the Spirit and firmly rooted in Christ.

So picture with me a tree nursery.¹ Seeds are planted in pots of soil. The pots are placed in a greenhouse where they receive water and light. They are kept warm. Soon, the seeds come alive, germinate, and sprout from the soil. They draw on the rich, organic nutrients within the soil. So also faith springs to life from the Gospel nutrients within the soil of God’s story. Still fragile, the tender seedlings grow inch by inch and become stronger by the day. After a while, the seedlings are moved outside the greenhouse. There they continue to grow in the pot along with other seedlings beneath the sky and sun.

Once the seedlings grow tall enough and strong enough, they are planted in the ground among other trees in a grove or a new forest. There they continue to grow among the other trees. There they continue to draw upon the rich nutrients in the soil. There they grow and weather the changing seasons: fall, winter, spring, and summer. There they may experience drought, rain, and wind. But as they grow along with the other trees, they form a community of trees that we call a forest. As part of a forest, they provide food and shelter for other creatures. As part of a forest, this community of trees prevents erosion, purifies groundwater, and provides wind barriers.

¹ The following analogy is drawn from *Rooted in the Faith—Preparations for Church Membership* by Dr. Charles P. Arand (St. Louis: CPH, 2010), pp. 6-11.

This picture of a seed growing into a tree provides a snapshot of the Christian life. As we grow in faith, we go through a number of transitions or milestones. We observe one such milestone today with our Confirmation celebration. But the Christian life begins with a seed of faith in Christ.

Through Baptism, the seed of faith is planted within the soil of God's Word and promise where the Gospel brings it to life and nourishes it. But that seedling needs to be nurtured and cultivated within the protective arms of the nursery so that it is not beaten down by the storms that blow its way. So it is for children and for adults who are new to the faith. We need the milk of the Word. Our roots in the faith need the rich nutrients of the Gospel. And so we receive instruction in the basics of the faith and receive the Gospel through the Service of the Word.

As we grow and become stronger, we encounter the milestone of confirmation. This is the milestone that Sheree, Philip, Rebecca, Alyssa, and Junior have recently reached. In some ways, confirmation marks a Christian's transition from the greenhouse to joining the other trees in the grove. There with the congregation the newly confirmed Christians continue to grow strong in order to bear fruit within the world. They join others in receiving the Lord's Supper. And together we continue to draw on the riches of the Gospel. We are firmly rooted in Christ through the continual reception of the Word and the Sacraments.

In the Rite of Confirmation, the confirmands are asked whether they intend to remain faithful to Christ and to his Word as long as they live in this world. This is not an easy task. Satan works hard to undermine faith in Christ. Satan seeks to lead Christians away from faith through false teachings, persecutions, and other difficulties in life.

This is why the analogy of a growing tree is so helpful. As a sapling sinks its roots into the ground and draws upon the nutrients in the soil, the tree grows in height and stature. It also bears fruit. In addition, as the tree's roots grow deeper, the soil firmly anchors the tree so that it becomes capable of withstanding strong winds and storms.

So also our faith starts out as a small sapling. Jesus even compared Christian faith to a tiny mustard seed. It may seem small and weak. But just as inside a mustard seed rests the potential for life, so too our living faith in the living, resurrected Christ sinks its roots into the Scriptures and the Sacraments. From that Word of God delivered and revealed through the Sacraments and in the Bible faith draws the water and nutrients necessary for its life and growth. It becomes more active in producing the fruits of faith. The deeper that our faith sinks its roots into the soil of the Word and the Sacraments the stronger and sturdier it grows within the world. Anchored deeply in the Word, our faith is better prepared to weather any storm that blows our way. Firmly rooted in Christ now and unto eternity. Amen.