

Sermon 11 17 16

Well, tomorrow we welcome Bishop William “Chip” Stokes to Church of the Good Shepherd. This is a great occasion. He visits each church in our diocese at least once every three years.

One of the most important things about the Bishop’s visit is usually Confirmation. When a Bishop visits he usually performs one of the few functions that *only* a bishop can do. He confirms (usually) young people in their faith. Tomorrow, we are celebrating the Confirmations of nine of our young people.

This is a sign of their approaching adulthood. This is an adult decision. They decide whether or not they want to be confirmed. (A side note here: When I was at St. Mary’s in Stone Harbor, there were two girls in my Confirmation class who decided, prior to the Confirmation rite, that they didn’t want to be confirmed. I accepted their decision. Their parents got mad at me. Sorry, I am not going to insist that anyone be confirmed. This is an independent decision.)

When babies are baptized into the church, their parents and godparents and all of us here as members of this church, take vows to receive them into the church, into all Episcopal and Anglican churches, and to be responsible for their growth as Christians. We say, “We receive you into the Household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.”

When they are confirmed, our young people are literally *confirming*, for themselves, the vows their parents and godparents and all of us made here on their behalf. The bishop seals it. That is no small step. I’m glad those two girls in Stone Harbor took it seriously enough to say “No.”

A couple of other things can happen at Confirmation, but they don’t happen as often. People can be Reaffirmed or Received.

For Reaffirmation, well, sometimes a person feels as if he or she has left the Church or fallen away and they want to publicly reaffirm their faith. You might call this a “do-over.” And they not only want to reaffirm their faith, they want to reaffirm it publicly, There’s a lot to be said for public speech, for public testimony. It is especially meaningful in your household of God, in front of all the other members of your household – your family.

We are all members of God’s family. We are all brothers and sisters under God.

The other thing we can ask our Bishop to celebrate at this time is reception. This is when people come to us from another faith system and they ask to be received into the Episcopal Church. We accept people from all faiths for attendance. But if a Buddhist or Muslim or Roman Catholic person wants to be considered Episcopalian, it's probably a good idea for them to study Episcopalianism (I wonder if that's a word?), to really know what they're getting into. I started out as a Baptist. I was baptized, and my baptism "counted," but I wanted to be *received*. So I was. And here I am.

We're asked to make a variety of important decisions in our lives: what to study in school; what we sort of friends we want. Who we want to spend the rest of our lives with. We're asked to make these decisions so we can,

"...approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

We should be so proud of our kids. They have studied and they have learned and they have made their decisions. And whatever their decisions, we can all live our lives together, in community, in this Household of God, provoking each other to love and good deeds.