

Confirmation/Ordination

2 Timothy 1:3-14, John 13:1-15

Center Church

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When Jesus wanted to make it clear what his disciples should be up to in the world, John's gospel tells a story in which Jesus doesn't give a lecture (he does that elsewhere in all the gospels), or do something that is "religious." Instead, he does a job, a job that usually belonged to a servant, a slave, or a young child. When someone came into a home in the days when roads were dirt and shoes were sandals, if there were shoes, feet needed to be washed for two reasons: so dirt didn't spread throughout the house and so the person attached to the feet got some relief. It was a courtesy, but it was also someone's work. Not terribly pleasant work at that, if you think about all those dirty feet. Certainly not work that anyone would expect Jesus to do!

Why, then, did he put on the clothing of a servant and do this menial work? He told the disciples it was so they understood that their job now was not to sit on thrones or have special privileges. Their job, as his followers, was to serve people.

This was their ordination, their commissioning, a symbol of how they were to relate to one another and to the people around them. In the church, we commission people to be disciples in two rites: Confirmation and Ordination. Confirmation is for everyone. Ordination is reserved to those who will make their job service in some way specifically through the church.

How many of you have been either Confirmed or Ordained or both? If not formal Confirmation, joining the church and making promises is a similar thing, or if you were baptized as a teen or adult, same concept. In those rites, we were commissioned by Christ, and by the Church, to be disciples **wherever we are, not just in Church!** Whether our feet were washed, or our head moistened, or our body

dunked, or hands laid on our head and shoulders, or just hands shaken after promises made, we have all been commissioned to be Christ's disciples in whatever work we do.

What in heaven's name does that mean? Do I have to talk about Jesus to my classroom or co-workers or patients all the time? Well, there may be an opportunity at work to talk about your faith or even invite people to church, but for most people, an anonymous Christian summed it up best: "Preach the gospel always; use words if necessary." Whatever you do, do it as a disciple of Jesus, a living proclamation of the gospel.

The Confirmation service in the UCC Book of Worship is chock full of prayers that try to spell out what this means. One goes like this: "Increase in them the gifts of your Holy Spirit. Grant love for others, joy in serving you, peace in disagreement, patience in suffering, kindness toward all people, goodness in evil times, faithfulness in temptation, gentleness in the face of opposition, self-control in all things. Thereby strengthen them for their ministry in the world."

As a Christian, you do all that, in addition to whatever the requirements are of whatever paid work, volunteer work, homemaking work, family care, school work you are called to do. All of that around and through it, like the air that your work breathes in order to happen. Love for others. (Deep breath in and out after each thing) Kindness toward all. (Breathe) Goodness in the face of evil. (Breathe) Turning away from the temptation to take the easy or unethical or the-emotionally-satisfying-but-harmful path. (Breathe) Gentleness when someone opposes you. (Breathe) Self-control always. (Breathe)

I don't know about you, but barely a day goes by for me when I haven't fallen short in at least one of those categories. Then I remember that the air I breathe is God's grace, and I am encouraged to try again. I remember the vow of Confirmation: "God I give myself to you as your own, to love and serve you faithfully all the days of my life." And I start again.

Paul writes to his young apprentice Timothy and encourages him to “fan into flame the gift of God which is in you.” Get fired up, we might say, to live love in all times and places, when it’s easy and when it’s hard. At church, at home, in the streets and stores and restaurants, at school, at work. Christians, this is our labor.

If you’ve ever been to the Ordination of a minister in the UCC, you may have witnessed this lovely, moving moment in the service. After vows have been made by the candidate, the leader of the service says to the congregation: “People of God, you have heard the promises made. What is your will?” The people are invited to respond with these words: “By the grace of God, he/she/they are worthy! Let us ordain him/her/them! Come, Holy Spirit!”

By the grace of God—hear that, by God’s loving grace alone, we are worthy of living as disciples of Jesus in whatever we are called to in our work and life. We are worthy of being called to discipleship at all places and times. All of us. May the flame of faith and hope and determination be fanned into fire within each of us. And, as another prayer in the Confirmation service puts it: “Help us to live not for ourselves alone, but for Christ and those whom Christ loves. Keep us steady and abounding in hope, never giving up, pressing toward the goal of life with God in Jesus Christ.” Come, beloved, labor on! Amen.