

Sticky Faith

A Confirmation Meditation

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Today is a great day for our thirteen confirmands. I gave each one a gift and each one made a selection that appealed to them. Confirmands, please take the object that I gave you and raise it high so the congregation can see. As you can see, the object that I gave them is duct tape, something we use a lot and that you can do almost anything with. Duct tape is not just silver anymore: now you can get it in any color! There is even designer duct tape! You can see that each confirmand made a unique color choice, just like the uniquely gifted and interesting persons that each one is.

Just as Jesus, the ultimate teacher, would often use objects to get His truth into the hearts and minds of people so they could easily remember it for a long time and get His point, I, too, was inspired to use an object. Jesus used images like fish, nets, fishing, bread, water, rivers, trees, fruit, vineyards, shepherds and sheep to make an impression that would stick. I, however, am using duct tape.

When I was younger, duct tape could fix just about anything: the cracked seat on a bicycle, a broken tennis racquet, a leaky pipe, torn blue jeans. If you have ever used duct tape to repair something, raise your hand! I would imagine that there are some good stories among you! Even astronauts in the crippled Apollo 13 space capsule used duct tape to improvise a lifesaving carbon dioxide filter. Duct tape became standard equipment on the space shuttle and the International Space Station.

However, there is one small problem with duct tape: after a while, it starts to tear and rip. If it gets too wet, it begins to loosen and then your bike seat, tennis racquet, leaky pipe, or blue jeans are broken or ripped again! Duct tape is only a quick fix, a temporary solution! There is no denying, however, that duct tape is one of those invaluable items that can solve many of life's little problems.

In Finland, duct tape is referred to as "Jesus Tape." You can only assume that this is because it is the savior of all things broken. Those Finnish folks also know that Jesus is the savior of all things broken in us humans.

This morning, I was so proud of these young persons declaring their faith in Jesus Christ, their faith in God in Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. This past week in *The Christian Century Journal*, I read an article titled *Sticky Faith*, which details a study about what keeps kids connected to church. These 13 new members of First Church are, indeed, on a faith journey! But are there things that we might do as a faith community to help their faith become sticky faith that will be with them always? Over my years as a youth minister, I have seen many of our youth move away from the church as their lives have transitioned. Are there things that we might do as a faith community to prevent them from moving further away as they progress through high school, get a driver's license, become more involved in sports and other activities, go off to college, join the military, or start a work career?

Right now, these 13 are still among us. Sticky faith is all about love and caring, compassion and service, and so much more. Where did these ideas come from? Parents, you have been nurturing their faith for a long time. Good job! Will the parents stand up? And grandparents, godparents, close adult friends, will you also stand up? And let's not forget the mentors.

In Paul's letter to Timothy (verses 5-7) the primary importance of the family is affirmed:

⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. ⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

Faith is started, passed on, shared, taught, and modeled in the home. Faith in action is made real there. Your children saw it firsthand and were encouraged to survive spiritually. By observing you, they have learned patience while fishing; they've learned manners at the store; they've learned about kindness and thinking of others and give and take in relationships. Your children mimic you and want to be like you. You have the extraordinary gift of influence. And all of this becomes a foundation for lasting faith.

So, confirmands, listen to your parents and relatives and adult friends who are still walking on this faith journey with you. Let them shape you and mold you; treat them with respect as they encourage you in your times of doubt and questioning and wrestling. Confirmands, likewise, you are also shaping and molding them.

A sticky faith is nurtured here in our intergenerational faith community that surrounds the confirmands, as well as all of our children and adults. Will all of you stand? Confirmands, please turn around and look at these persons who care about you. They hope you will keep coming to church so they can know your names and be partners in a faith journey together. These folks are trying to develop a sticky faith too! Developing and maintaining a relationship with God requires engagement with scripture and the stories of Jesus found there. As partners in faith, all of you can remind each other that the Christian faith is centered on the person of Jesus. The Fuller Youth Institute's Sticky Faith Movement tells us that "for faith to stick, teens need to be connected to at least five adults."

Another scripture that says so much about a sticky faith is Deuteronomy 6:4-9: Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

What I love about these verses are the two principles that exemplify the actions of fully vested followers of God. These verses loudly and clearly command us all to be partners together as active participants in our children's spiritual formation.

Confirmands, I know that at least a few of you and a lot of other teens think that the church is not cool. The good news is the church does not have to be cool to be relevant. What the church has is Jesus, and he is enough. He is what differentiates the church from every other organization. Jesus is why the church matters. What we want to do is help you to see God's grace in your life. We want to encourage you to try new things and we want to help you learn from your successes and your mistakes. We want you to know that Jesus is not wimpy, he is revolutionary; Jesus isn't just tolerant, he is loving; and, although Jesus is good, Jesus is also God. We want you to be part of the vision of First Church in the 21st century, and we need you to be our partners in faith so all of us can have a faith with stickiness that we can stay with and explore together.

By fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, we will have those things that will give us the strength to not grow weary or lose heart! Sticky faith gives us strength to finish the race marked out for us. All of us here want a faith that is deepening, that will last throughout all the transitions and cycles of our lives.

(While holding up duct tape) This might be called Jesus Tape by some. Duct tape is certainly useful often – but Jesus is for always!

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