

2019 Charge to the Confirmands

Rev. John Allen

On the table in front of me are 13 candles, each one was decorated by one of the participants in our confirmation class the very first time we gathered for a retreat at Craigville Retreat Center on Cape Cod.

Each week we would begin our time together by lighting our candle and placing it in the center of the circle, a reminder that together we were building a community, and striving to keep our attention focused on what we were doing together.

These candles have burned down a ways since we began.

And every inch of wax that has burned away carries a story. The night we gathered to explore images of God, the stories that we read about Jesus, the healer, the wisdom teacher, the social prophet, the movement founder, and the spirit person. The night we had races to see who could find Bible passages the fastest, and the moments we

sat in stillness listening for the quiet voice of God calling us beloved and good.

And as the flame fell lower and lower into the glass of the candle, the images, patterns, and colors that you covered the surface of the candle with began to shine in new ways, with the light behind them refracting in a new way week, by week.

In the beginning of Confirmation we talked about how all faith is a journey, and it lasts our whole lives long.

These candles are a living testament to the journey we have taken together, they mark not only the time that has passed, but the ways you each have changed as the light and love of God shines through your experiences, your hopes, your questions, and your fears.

And through all that time, I have gotten to know each of you better too. Your gifts, your joy, your humor, your restlessness at the state of the world, your hopes, and your inspiring questions and wondering.

I chose this scripture passage from Romans which, Steve just read for us, as the reading for your confirmation class because what I have seen in you is that you understand that living a life of faith means letting the varied parts of your life shine with something of the light of God's love.

Paul is giving advice to new members of the Christian community, thousands of years ago, but it is sound advice for each of you, and all of us today.

Paul says: "Let love be genuine, love one another with mutual affection." So many times I heard you all express your understanding that love is at the heart of our faith, God's love for us, and our call to love one another.

So keep loving, and let God's light shine in your love.

Paul say: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.” I know that the world is a scary place full of immense challenges that confront all of us, and the consequences fall on your generations shoulders. Our faith teaches us in this to always seek the signs of hope that give us joy, but to persevere in working to make the world a better place.

I trust that you all will make that work your own, each in your own way. And I know that as you strive to improve your community and the world, God’s light will shine through your lives.

Paul says: “Outdo one another in showing honor and contribute to the needs of God’s people.” I know that you are a very driven group of people. Your schoolwork and your athletic and musical skills and accomplishments are admirable and you all work very, very hard at them.

I also believe that you know that what matters most in this world is not what we accomplish for ourselves but what we are able to do for others.

I know that there is a lot of pressure on you all to achieve and accomplish at every turn. The most important thing you can learn from our faith is that no matter what happens God will love you, and you are always worthy of love no matter your grades, or the score of your game, or what school you attend.

And what we are ultimately measured by in our religious life is not how we outdo each other at work, or at school, or on the field, but how well we care for other people, especially the poor and vulnerable people in our world.

Keep your heart open to your neighbor, and God's light will shine in your life in extraordinary ways.

So, at the close of today's service, you will take your candle home. What you do with it after that is up to you, but let me suggest that you keep it someplace you can see it, and light it, from time to time.

Notice how as the candle burns, it changes. And notice how you too are changing as you continue to grow in faith and in love.

And know that just as this candle glows with the persistent light of its flame.

Wherever you go, whoever you become, whoever you grow to love, wherever you land, the light of God's love will always shine brightly in the very center of your heart.