

*The Two Most Important Prayers: "I'm Your Child" and "I Can't Find You" June 7, 2015*

Today is Confirmation Sunday, the day that we recognize these young people in our congregation as having intentionally started the journey of faith, and we welcome them as full members of our church in partnership with us on this journey of following Jesus. Jesus said that the two most important things we are to do are to love God with everything we have and do and are, and to love other people in the respectful, caring, and merciful ways we ourselves long to be loved. This is lifelong work, not for the faint of heart, and not to be taken alone. We are the Body of Christ, all of us indispensable and valued members of the church. Being a solo Christian is like being a solo charcoal briquette; we need the love and presence and the fire of each other or we lose faith and lose interest and the flame within us can die and turn to ash.

Today, Confirmands, we recognize you as fellow-travelers on the journey of faith, ready and capable of taking your place as both followers of Jesus Christ and leaders in the community of faith. I don't know what this will look like for you, to be leaders in our community, but I do know that our expectations are that you will say "yes" or at least "I will prayerfully consider this" when we ask you to serve God and others through: your prayers for our common life together; your presence here in worship, Sunday school, and youth group; your financial gifts as you are able to share them; your strong arms and creative minds in serving the poor, the hungry, and the forgotten in this world; and your continued willingness to learn how to witness to your faith in Jesus Christ in both your words and actions.

One of my favorite authors, Anne Lamott, wrote the book, *Help, Thanks, and Wow*. She says that the two most important prayers are "Thank You" and "Help." Both of those prayers point us to God, just as the stars in the bowl of the Big Dipper point us to the North Star.

"Thank You" is a bigger prayer than telling God: "Thanks, I've got what I want and I'll let You know if I need anything else." (Sometimes this is called the cosmic-bellhop idea of God... that God is standing by to give you any little thing you need while you're a guest at God's hotel.) "Thank You" is really telling God (and reminding yourself) that you realize that you are God's child. You belong to God, and wherever you go, God is there. So you aren't on this journey of faith alone because God is already here, already waiting for you. We call this prevenient grace - prevenient means to come before - so before you were even aware of God, God was already loving you; God was already anticipating you loving God back.

"Thank You" is a bigger prayer than "I'm happy." Let's call this most important prayer, instead, "I'm Your child," which is a prayer of gratitude for God's presence with you. It's can be a reminder to you that even when all evidence is to the contrary, God is with you, loving you, giving you courage and strength and hope. "I'm Your child" is a prayer that also acknowledges other people as the family of God, that God cares about all of us, and that God's heart is big enough for all of us. The gospel of John tells us: "For God so loved the world that God gave His only Son..." I wish John had added the word "whole" so that this scripture read: "For God so loved the *whole* world that God gave His only Son." God loves the whole world and there is a lot of trouble and heartache and poverty and war and evil in this world, so there is a lot you can do - with God's help - to care for others and make this world more the way God wants it to be.

“I’m Your child” is a prayer of solidarity with God, that the things that break God’s heart will also break your heart, and that you’re open to how God can use you to ease some of the suffering in the world.

“I’m Your child” is a prayer that admits that you are not perfect, but in fact vulnerable and fragile and that your soul has some broken and jagged places. “I’m Your child” is a prayer that confesses that you need God; you can’t fix yourself; you are a sinner (like every one of us) in need of God’s saving grace.

“I’m Your child” is a prayer of love and trust in God, much like you love and trust your parents and grandparents and favorite aunts and uncles. These people care about you and would do anything to protect you and help you; some of them would give their lives for you, if you needed them to. That’s how God loves you. That’s how God wants you to love Him back. “Thank You... I’m Your child” is actually a big, big prayer.

The second most important prayer is “Help.” Do you remember getting lost as a child? Maybe in a store? You couldn’t find your parents and you panicked, maybe thinking that you had lost them forever? It’s a ghastly feeling to be lost; it makes you hold your breath and feel all clammy and terrified. “Help” is a prayer that really means, “I can’t find You.” Faith is not just about what you know for certain about God; the things you’re confident about; the ways you experience God. Faith is also being strong enough to admit to having doubts, to not having all the answers; to sometimes being angry with and disappointed in God; and to sometimes not be able to find God. Believing in God is harder than not believing in God, sometimes especially believing in a loving God.

When you are overwhelmed by trouble and stress and fear and loneliness it might feel like you have lost your little girl in Mervyn’s department store and you are getting all breathless and freaked out and starting to cry and thinking about shrieking “I can’t find my child” because you are just so, so scared that you would never see her again... sometimes that’s what it feels like to lose your way, to feel like you’ve lost God. (And yes, this I was that mother in Mervyn’s, and Mimi was that little girl.) “I can’t find You” is a prayer that acknowledges that sometimes we feel lost and alone and frightened and maybe even abandoned by God.

“I can’t find You” is a perfectly acceptable prayer - a cry from your heart - in times when you feel lost, betrayed, or devastated by other people or by life circumstances. And it’s a way... it’s not magic... but can be a small way to find your way back home to God. “I can find You” is a prayer-reminder to yourself that you are, in fact, looking for God, looking for hope and love and strength and faith.

And maybe it’s a prayer that leads you to a church, to a faith community, where other people can love you and care for you and share hope and strength and courage with you until you are able to find some for yourself again.

“I can’t find You” is an honest prayer and it’s okay to say it aloud or to shout it or to sob it when you aren’t sure where God is, and you feel like I did at Mervyn’s when I couldn’t find Mimi. It’s okay to say it (or scream it) to God and it’s okay to admit it to other people; when it feels like your faith is lost and you don’t know where God is. One of the gifts of being the church is that we believe together, and sometimes we believe for each other... and sometimes we hang out with people who believe because we’d like to believe but we can’t. We are God’s family. We are all God’s family. Part of what that means is that when you’re not here we’re not all here. We’re not complete. We need you, and you need us, and we all need Jesus.

I think “Thank You” and “Help” are the two most important prayers and if those are the only prayers you ever pray... it will be enough.

You’ve each written a statement of faith, and I invite you now to share them with our congregation. We’re going to bless you, and invite your family and friends to join us at the kneeler, as we say two prayers over you: Thank you... Thank You, God, for this wonderful young man, or young woman. And help. Help them him or her to continue to grow in You and to be a shining light in this world of Your love. And help us to continue to love and guide them. Amen.