

Charge to Confirmands - 2018

Rev. John Allen

Each year's confirmation class is a little different. Yet each year, there is always some aspect of the class that the group really connects with. It's always hard to predict what it will be.

This year's group loved fire.

I first noticed it on our Fall retreat.

As we all likely know, it can be very hard to get away from the stresses and demands of life. Even when we put some space between us and our work. Those things that weigh on us still hover close to our spirits and linger in our minds.

To help, I brought some flash paper. [hold it up]

So at the start of the retreat, on the first night we sat, and talked about everything we felt like we needed to 'let go' of.

School work. Stress. Arguments with friends.

And one by one, the confirmands took their paper to the candle and [burn one]

Let it go.

Now not everyone was super eager about holding such a burning slip of paper in their hands. Yet, one by one, with a bit of encouragement, and their own bravery, you all lit one.

Several of you reflected later, that it was more than just a moment of letting go what was back at home, but it was a moment when you also let go of some of your reluctance to be a part of this group.

It was an important bonding experience.

So fast forward, we were planning our last confirmation class, and I asked what we should do.

It was unanimous.

Flash paper.

So, we ended where we began.

This time we read three stories from the Bible that featured Fire. Including the story we heard this morning where John the Baptist predicts that Jesus would kindle a fire in people's hearts.

We read the story of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came as a fire that spread among the people and inspired them.

We read about how God spoke to Moses out of the fire of a burning bush.

We talked about how Fire is a good image for God.

Fire is like a flash of insight, or wisdom. It is a source of light, heat, energy, and strength. It spreads. And we feel our passions for loving others, for fighting for what is right, speaking up against violence and injustice, we feel it as a fire in our hearts. A Holy Fire from God.

[to confirmands]

Through the past months, we have tended to a fire together. We have kindled the fires of curiosity and commitment. We have stoked the fire of hope and wisdom.

We are here today to confirm the promises made in your baptism.

When you were children, whether it was at this church, or someplace else, you were baptized with water.

With water, we welcomed you into the Christian family.

With water we signified your acceptance into the church. We celebrate that God made you, and your goodness, and sent you as a gift to us.

That day you were baptized with water.

Today, you are baptized with fire. [light one]

That is, today, as we together confirm the promises of baptism, we are calling on the Holy Spirit, the heavenly fire, to come and ignite the passion in your heart. [light one]

We ask the Spirit to come and keep well the fire of curiosity that burns in your minds. [light one]

And we hope that you will live lives of service, commitment, and love, that will shine like beacons to all those who need comfort and hope in the midst of life's journey. [light one]

As a congregation, we are the beneficiaries of a great gift as you step forward to add your light to ours today.

And there are few things that give me more hope for the future of our world than knowing that you all will be out there, burning bright, lighting the world ablaze with love.

Each of you, just the way you are. You are a gift from God.

Thank you for being who you are.