Today is a very special day in the life of our church. It is Confirmation Sunday! But what is that and why do we do it? Great questions. In our United Methodist tradition, a child is typically baptized when they are very young, often as babies, because we believe God’s grace is already at work in them. If Jesus said the children are good enough for heaven, “Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Matthew 19:14), then they are good enough to belong to the church.

But when this happens, it is not the child who makes the confession of faith but the parents on their behalf, and they and the church together make a commitment to raise that child in the Christian faith. This is what we understand as discipleship: teaching and learning to be Christ-like. The next step in this process of becoming Christ-like for a baptized child is when they become old enough to make a conscious decision for Christ, confirming the decision their parents and church made on their behalf when they were baptized.

So, confirmation marks the start of a new chapter in the spiritual journey of these young people as confessed Christians. A day that honors not only the faith of their parents and church but also their own faith and commitment to living a Christ-centered life.

As such, this is a significant event in the life of these young people because it not only marks them as confessed disciples of Jesus but also challenges them into a lifelong journey of faith, service, and love, striving each day to live in the example of Jesus Christ. As you can imagine, this is not an easy task. If it is difficult for us adults to practice our faith, just think how challenging it is for them to do so in our wild world. Nevertheless, these young people are faithful, courageous, and committed by being here today. That is why we make such a big deal of this and celebrate with them their love for God and dedication to God’s church.

I had my confirmation later in life when I was a 17-year-old young man. I was baptized as a baby in the Roman Catholic Church but then became a Methodist and had my confirmation there. Better later than ever, right? This was so important to me; I wanted to stand in front of everyone and speak a confession of faith in Jesus with my lips. I wanted people to know my faith, not just assume it. That experience was life-changing and made me who I am today.

That is one of the reasons why Confirmation is such a powerful moment. We move from assuming to consciously realizing our faith. For this reason, it is indeed a day of celebration for these young people but also a reminder to us of what it means to be a disciple to live a Christ-like life. So, think of this day not only in terms of what we are doing but what is happening to our confirmands and even us too.

For this, today’s message is about what it is to be “Christ-like.” We often hear this phrase of being “Christ-like,” but it is a concept that can be challenging to fully comprehend and even more challenging to put into practice. In essence, to be Christ-like is to be a disciple, to learn from Jesus how to live our lives. We do this by studying and paying attention to what he did and said, trying our best to do likewise. I am talking about a life marked by love, compassion, humility, selflessness, and the constant pursuit of what is right, a life about embodying the love, grace, and truth central to Jesus’ life and his teachings.

Think about what this looks like. What could happen to you if you live more Christ-like? What could happen to your family and friends if you were more Christ-like around them? I can tell you my experience: if you choose to live more Christ-like, you will experience a deeper sense of purpose and significance because your life is not reduced by having success in this world or by living up to the expectations of other people; instead, you discover that real meaning and happiness in life come from experiencing love, compassion, and community. This rearranges your priorities and what you cherish most in life. You become less driven by greed and much more empowered by gratitude. And this gift of Christ-like character becomes a fruit instead of an accessory sprouting from within as we reflect on the teachings of Jesus, cultivating his Spirit of forgiveness, understanding, peace, and humility in our daily lives. And because of that, life becomes less of a race and more of a ride to enjoy despite the suffering and challenges we all experience at different times in our life journey.

Can you imagine how different your life could be if you become Christ-like? When was the last time you intentionally studied and learned to be more like Jesus? When was the last time that you dedicated time to understanding through Bible study and prayer? I ask this because I know how hard it is to dedicate quality time to studying the Bible and praying not just for wants and needs but to spend time with God just because we want to. I will be the first to raise my hand confessing that I often think I am too busy to do that—so I tell myself.

So, how different would our lives be if we were more intentional about being Christ-like? It could be a source of inspiration and peace for our family and friends. By being Christ-like, you can bless the people you love in ways that are so transformative that you will change their present and future in amazing and beautiful ways. Imagine raising children with a strong character based on love, kindness, forgiveness, and truth. I know I want that for my own people. I can tell you that when I think of children as adults, my greatest joy will not come from how wealthy or successful they are but from the kind of people they become and how they make the world a better place for others. Again, that is a fruit in me as much as it will be in them.

All this means is that in being Christ-like, we each have the potential to positively impact our families, communities, and world, one act of love at a time. Unsurprisingly, amazing things happen when we are more like Jesus.

Let me share some Scriptures that speak about being Christ-like in practical ways. In Philippians 2:1-5, the apostle Paul writes,

“If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

This scripture beautifully illustrates the essence of being Christ-like. It is about cultivating a spirit of humility, compassion, and selflessness, just as Jesus did. It’s about seeking unity, not division; looking out for the interests of others before our own. In short, it is about love.

This brings us to the heart of what it means to be Christ-like, and that is love. Love is at the center of our faith. It is the greatest commandment, as Jesus himself taught us in Matthew 22:37-40,

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

In these verses, we find the essence of discipleship. It is not about being without flaws or never making a mistake. It is about an ongoing journey towards perfect love, towards loving God wholeheartedly, and our neighbors as ourselves. This love, as the apostle John tells us in 1 John 4:7-12, is the very nature of God,

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.”

These powerful words remind us that to know God is to know love, and to live a Christ-like life is to let that love shine through our thoughts, words, and deeds.

I know this could be challenging, but from personal experience, it becomes easier when we welcome God’s love with gratitude and move from thinking of our faith as a choice to realizing this is who we are, a child of God. For me, my faith is not a choice but a testimony of who I am.

Church, this is who we are and our calling: to be Christ-like, continually growing, changing, and becoming more like Jesus, just as Confirmation is not just a one-time event but a lifelong process of growing in faith, service, and love.

Here is the invitation and good news today: As we witness and celebrate our confirmands today, let us not only rejoice in their commitment to this journey but let us also remember our own commitments to be Christ-like, to pursue a life of perfect love with our family, friends, and the world. Let us be witnesses and embody the humility, selflessness, and unity that Christ modeled, to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. And as we rejoice in the faith of our young people, let us also renew our commitment to support them on their spiritual journey. It is our privilege and responsibility to nurture their faith, encourage their growth, and walk alongside them as they grow more Christ-like each day.

And the good news is that we are all in this together, bound by our shared faith and love for God. So, let us continue to encourage and support each other as we walk this journey of faith together.