

Confirmation Ministers the Power of Jesus

by Stewart Ruch

Confirmation ministers the power of God, and we must walk in the power of God's people and the Holy Spirit to live a life of transformation.

Duration: 23:38

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 6:4, Ephesians 4:1-5

Topics: "Confirmation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the process of becoming a force for Jesus in one's generation. He shares personal experiences of facing challenges and changes in his life, such as moving to a new high school and his parents' divorce, and how he remained faithful to Jesus through those situations. The speaker emphasizes the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit and walking in God's will. He uses the analogy of getting drunk with wine to explain how being filled with the Holy Spirit can transform a person's behavior and thought patterns. The sermon concludes with a personal story of receiving a cassette tape with a Christian song that had a profound impact on the speaker's life.

Transcript

This is Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. This week's sermon is by Bishop Stuart Ruck and is part four of our fully sacramental series. This is definitely one of my favorite times of the entire year here at Church of the Resurrection.

We had the opportunity to confirm several young men and women in their faith in Jesus Christ. And when we do this, it brings together a couple of very important things to us at Church of the Resurrection. Our deep commitment to the next generation and our belief in the power of God.

So pray with me. Father in heaven, we ask now for the power of the birth of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the resurrection life of Jesus to be visited upon all of us now and upon these young women and this young man who will now receive the laying on of hands. Lord, come empower us in Jesus's name.

Amen. You may be seated. Okay, so come from man's, it's my expectation that at least a few of you who, I baptized at least a few of you when you were much, much smaller, have heard what I'm going to share with you in the beginning many times.

I want to share with you and with you all a moment I had that was very defining for me in my teenage years. And I've since shared that with successive confirmation generations for a long time. And I plan on continuing to share it.

It was June of 1983. I was at a summer camp in North Carolina. I was there with many of my buddies, some of them very committed followers of Jesus, some of them not committed followers of Jesus, some of them not sure.

We were lying on our backs. Our leader was there. It was one of those just golden moon nights, full moon, not at all unlike last night, which I took note of.

And I think spontaneously the leader just said to us, whenever you see a full moon, you guys, what if we all committed to pray, make me a force for Jesus in my generation. What if a full moon became a prayer trigger? Now, I think I probably have had a lot of moments like that where someone was trying to create a moment for me to remember something, for a lot of sermons where I was supposed to remember something, and I've forgotten a lot. But God chose that moment to set into my heart and my mind that mechanism.

So now for decades, when I see a full moon, I'm out camping, I look out the bedroom window, I'm parking the car and walking back to the house, and I see a full moon, I've prayed, God, make me a force for Jesus into my generation. And I would like to give that prayer to you all. I'd like to ask you to pray that, because that's the heart of confirmation.

Now, here's what I haven't talked about before. How? How? How do you get from point A to point B? How do you hear a vision like that, a moment like that? But then how does it actually happen? In other words, how, when a month later in that very summer, my 16-year-old summer, I would move from really close friends, phenomenal sports teams, an incredible sense of community to a brand new high school, twice the size, all new people, how in that really challenging season would I be a force for Jesus in my generation? Or how, how about a year later, utterly unbeknownst to me, what would completely bring shock to my life, a year later in the summer of my 17-year-old life, my parents would separate and ultimately divorce. How, how in the midst of that, which utterly changed my life, would I become a force for Jesus in my generation? How about in my college years and post-college, when I would face temptations and opportunities that were contrary to the way of Jesus, they were, they were the way of foolishness, is what the Bible would call it, would be the way of the world, how would I in those moments, how would I in those years become a force for Jesus in my generation? How does it actually happen and go from a moment to a lifetime movement in God? How does it happen? And one of the most important words that the Apostle Paul gives us in several places throughout his writings and in the writings that we're looking at today in the book of Ephesians is he says, walk.

He says, walk. The way you get from point A to point B in Jesus is you walk. Indeed, this is stemming from Jesus' call that I shared with you guys in our very first confirmation class, come and follow me.

Come and walk behind me, walk with me, walk in me, walk empowered by me, because walking itself will not be enough. Indeed, you will have to choose, will I walk in the way of foolishness? Walking itself is not the way necessarily. Will I walk in the way of the world or will I walk in the way of the power of God? The world has great power and great influence and can give an incredible sense of momentum and an incredible sense of accomplishment and achievement and relief and even identity.

Will I walk in this way or will I walk in the way of the power of God? We have to have power from the living God himself to walk in his way. Confirmation ministers the power of God. That would be the title for today.

It's a different title in your bulletin. Confirmation ministers the power of God. I taught last week that baptism ministers closeness to Jesus.

Baptism gives us a new birth. But I said last week, the new birth is profound. The new birth ministers closeness to Jesus, but that must be walked out.

Remember, Paul said, walk in newness of life. And now Paul says, be careful how you walk. Chapter 5 of Ephesians.

I'd like to turn there, you guys. It will be in Ephesians chapter 4 and 5. If you're using a Rez Bible, that's page 977. If you're looking for it in your Bible, it's near the end of the overall Bible.

Ephesians chapter 4 and 5. In Ephesians chapter 4, Paul will say, walk in the power of God, but specifically walk in the power of God's people. The church has great spiritual power. And Paul will say, walk in the power of the people of God.

And then Ephesians 5, walk in the power of the spirit. The power of God's spirit. Confirmation is about being given power from God's people because you're associating yourselves and identifying yourselves and giving yourselves to the people of God in the church.

That's a big part of confirmation. The global church, the historic church, and especially all of us, the local church. But you're also giving yourself and asking God, Lord, renew the power of the Holy Spirit given me in baptism.

You were given the Holy Spirit. Now renew that power in me. So we were praying for you guys last night.

We had a prayer meeting here until late into the night, praying for you. Because so many of us know what's ahead. We know there are going to be moments that are going to come for you guys where you're going to be, I don't even know if this is a decision.

I'm so confused. I'm so bewildered. Is it a decision for the world? Is it a decision for God? We know that it's going to come all the time for you all because it comes all the time for us still.

So we prayed for you last night. And here was a prayer meeting somebody got. They got a picture as they were praying.

Sometimes God gives us pictures to know how to pray more. And the picture was of you all with your baptism candles. When a child's baptized or an adult baptized, they're given a baptism candle.

It's lit to the candle, which is a symbol of God's resurrection in Jesus Christ. You had a baptism candle. It was lit.

And you all walked down to the font. And this is interesting. You put your candle in the water, which we would think would extinguish the candle.

But it flamed up higher, like the water was gasoline. Like the water was ministering the most important thing, which is the power of the resurrection. So I'm praying that what you were given in baptism will flame

up today.

Walk in the power of God's people, chapter 4. Ephesians does a lot of work about what it means to be the people of God, how to live in the people of God, how to walk, how to walk. Paul, writing from a place of some level, he may have been with other people in prison, but certainly an experience of being solitary and alone, a prisoner of the Lord, verse 1, urges you to walk in a manner worthy. So walk in a manner worthy.

And specifically it says, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit. OK, so walk in the power of God's people. Let me talk to you about bearing, but also beware.

We have to bear and we have to beware. First of all, we bear with God's people. Why would Paul say bear with God's people? Because God's people are difficult.

All right. This is how it works in Christianity. We're not trying to fool you and say idealized community.

It's going to be absolutely amazing. Community life that will never bother you. Leaders that will never frustrate you or disappoint you.

Come to Christianity. No, we do it completely opposite. We're crazy this way.

All right. What we're saying is, OK, a community of faith. You're going to have to bear with one another because people are going to be difficult.

There's like all these sinners surrounding you all the time. And you're the only perfect one. You're the only one that really gets it.

You're the only one that knows how to have interpersonal relationships and do things right. And everyone else is wrong. So Paul says bear with one another.

No, it's worse than that, right? No, you're also wrong. They're wrong. You're wrong.

It makes for a massive mess. It means the church is really hard. If you haven't had hard yet in the life of the church, you may not have had the life of the church.

Church is hard. You have to bear with one another in love, maintaining the unity of the spirit. There's no idealized community in Christianity.

Confirmation says come into a localized community. It confronts us in that way. Confirmation confronts us and says these are the folks you're with.

By God's design, we're stuck with each other. So stability in church is really important. By finding a church that God has called you to love and sticking there is really important.

Bear with one another. Bear. But beware.

Beware the way of foolishness. Beware the temptation to live an independent life. Some independence is important and necessary for life maturation, but not as much as our American culture would triumph.

As a matter of fact, there's a spiritual kind of independence that is extremely dangerous. This says I can know who I am by myself. I can actually identify who I am and I will live by my identity of who I say I am or

who others around me say that I am in a way that is profoundly independent.

As a matter of fact, you guys remember in the vigil this year, Adam and Eve, the fall, and there was a scene at the very end of the Adam and Eve lesson where Adam is standing by himself like this. Eve is already gone. He is completely alone.

He is completely independent. The Bible would say beware of that. That you will discover who you are and what you're about from the power of God himself, from the Bible, from the church.

I had a Nigerian friend and I was telling him about my life in America. He said, well, tell me more about your village, Stewart. I said, oh, we don't live in villages.

I live in a suburb. Tell me about your suburb. Well, there's a whole bunch of houses and I don't really know everybody even on my street.

He said, you don't have villages. He said, my brother, how can you have everything in America but not have villages? I pity you. He was right.

He was right. No, we need the village church and that's what you're committing to today. I decided after I graduated from college that I was going to live in what we called an intentional community.

It was going to be a community that realized all of our ideals of community life. We were going to create our own village. We were all raised in the Christian faith in some capacity or another.

We had a three flat down in Chicago and we didn't really have a lot of goals. Our main goal was work as little as possible, hang out as much as possible. Those were kind of our two main community goals, which, you know, it doesn't sound too bad if you think about it or maybe if you don't think about it.

We weren't going to have any leadership because we didn't trust leadership. Why would you ever trust leadership, right? They always disappoint you. We weren't going to have anybody we didn't want in the community because why have people you don't want in the community, then you have to bear with them.

We wanted just people that we wanted in the community, which ended up being, even though we thought ourselves very liberal and broad minded, people a lot like us is who we actually wanted there. The same dismissal of authority, the same dismissal of the Bible, the same dismissal of conservative Christianity. And we lived this intentional community until we didn't, because it couldn't hold, because there was no center, because there was no leadership.

Somebody else came into the vacuum of leadership. They started leading, but nobody elected that person. They just took over.

And all of a sudden factions began to happen and people began to move away from one another. And before I knew, within a year, the entire intentional community of hanging out had utterly exploded. There was no center.

There was no bearing with one another. There was no power of the Holy Spirit. So we walk in the power of God's spirit.

Now Ephesians chapter 5, just turn the page there. Verse 15, look carefully then how you walk. Look carefully then how you walk.

Make the best of the time because the days are evil. Do not be foolish. Understand what the will of the Lord is.

Here is his will. This is a really interesting sentence you guys. And I think kind of risky for Paul as a teacher.

Do not get drunk with wine for that is sinful, but be filled. And the original writing would say be filled and continue to be filled. Keep filling the glass would be the image.

Be filled and continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is really interesting. Okay, so what happens when you get drunk? Well, something comes from outside, alcohol.

It goes inside. And as it goes inside, it changes the behavior of somebody. It changes the thought patterns of somebody.

It changes them. So I mean outside goes inside and changes you. Paul is saying when the Holy Spirit comes to you, he comes from outside of you into the reality of your sinful nature.

But he changes you. He changes your behavior. He changes how you think.

He changes how you act. Walk in the power of being filled and continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Oh, this is far greater than drunkenness, Paul is saying.

This is a change that will deeply and completely and fully over time transform you. It is the expectation of the Christian walking in the power of God to experience the wonders of God and the signs of God, which is to say that we will see supernatural things in our life in God as we live biblically. As a matter of fact, it is right to expect wonders.

It is right to expect the signs of God in our lives. Do they always equal the way we think they will? Is it always one plus one equals two? It is not in this deeply sinful world with deeply sinful people. But be assured even amidst the sin of this world and the incredible fear that many of us feel, the wonders of God break in regularly.

Anticipate them. The early church did. Expect them.

Those who walk in the power of God do. When we pray for you in confirmation, we're praying for the filling of the Holy Spirit. So about six months after this community totally exploded, and that was the new level of aloneness that I'd ever been.

Some friend sent me an old school cassette tape, and he recorded a song on this cassette tape, and he put it in an envelope and he sent it to me in the mail. And it was a Christian musician. At that point in my life, I strongly disliked anything Christian musician.

OK. But for some reason, I threw out the envelope. I was in the car and I put it in the cassette player.

And this song played, and the song itself is less important. I met the power of God. I met the love of the Father in that moment coming through that song.

And it was so powerful. I had to pull my car over on Ashland Avenue, and I had to sit there because I was crying so hard. And my car was so filled with the love of God the Father.

Me, who had been far from God. Me, who had made so many significant, foolish steps and walking. It was a wonder.

Or wonder may be a physical healing. Wonder may be what we saw over and over again this Holy Week of people being freed from demonic power. Wonder may be a lifting of anxiety.

So you can actually be quiet for 15 minutes and pray. So many wonders. And yet as well, so much just walking.

There are wonders, but much of it will be walking. One of the ways that the prayer book puts it in regard to confirmation is you walk in daily increase. You walk in just daily receiving of the Lord, daily receiving of the Holy Spirit.

You walk by daily being in your Bible. You walk by daily living the life of prayer. That there is wonder, be assured.

But it's also just praying for one another and learning the Bible and living it. I'll give you a picture of daily increase. I had many of our young leaders, men and women gathered who are going to help plant churches, are going to help lead churches, serve globally.

They were gathered this week. And so I just did a short teaching with them from the Bible about how it is that we can listen to God for each other. In other words, we can pray for each other, and we can listen to God for each other.

And sometimes God will give us a scripture verse for each other, very often, or a picture in prayer, like the picture I just shared at the beginning of this teaching. And we can pray that for the other person, just to strengthen them, to encourage them. It's a very simple exercise.

So I taught on it, and I said, we're going to take 10 minutes. I'm going to have you pair off, and you're just going to make a little contrive. You're just going to go, and you're going to say, God, would you give me a prayer for this person? Would you give me a scripture verse or a picture? And we're just going to try it.

Don't feel too awkward about it. It's okay. And we just went and prayed in pairs.

And they came back, and I said, okay, now I want you to talk about what happened and demystify. Just talk about what happened. One young woman said, her eyes were wide.

She just said, well, a week ago, somebody prayed for me, and they got a picture in prayer of a watering hole, and of people coming to that watering hole to be refreshed. And that's exactly what my prayer partner today got, was a picture of water, and people coming to water to be refreshed. It was like a confirmation.

Would I call that a wonder? Well, I guess, but I would actually just say that was a daily increase. That was God meeting them. Someone else said, my prayer partner got a picture of a dove lighting on me, and a dove was a symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, and I had been praying over and over again that I would increase in my ministry in the Holy Spirit, but my prayer partner, who doesn't even know me that well, had no idea that was important to me.

There it was. And they were strengthened by God's knowledge of them and His power to walk. And the power of God.

Confirmation ministers the power of God. Confirmation ministers the power of the people of God, and the power of the Spirit of God. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Thanks for listening. Our vision at Church of the Resurrection is to equip everyone for transformation.

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