

Confirmation Sunday, April 30, 2017  
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, Pastor Bill Chadwick

Davis, Christina, Morgan, Ty, David, today you are making a commitment to follow Jesus and to be an adult member of this family of faith known as Oak Grove Presbyterian Church. As I mentioned Tuesday night, this doesn't get you much in the area of rights and privileges. Without joining you can still come to youth group, go to Clearwater Forest, participate in worship, sing in the choir, volunteer your time. What *do* you get with official membership? Well, you can vote in congregational meetings and serve as an ordained deacon or elder. That's pretty much it.

Mostly what you are doing this morning is signing up for duty. You are saying to the rest of the Oak Grove family, you can count on me. When there is a need, call me and I will do my best to fill it.

What you are doing today is a big deal. A big deal in several ways. First, here is your pledge card. It has two parts—money and time and talents. How much of the money God has shared with you will you return to Christ's church and where will you give your time? Please fill these out between services and at this point in the second service I will collect them from you.

But what you are doing today is a bigger deal than that. You are pledging yourself to Jesus, who, according to the gospel of John, proclaimed himself to be “the way, the truth, the life.”

A quick look at each of these—the way, the truth, the life.

The earliest followers of Jesus were *not* collectively called “the Church,” but rather “the Way,” the way of following Jesus. WWJD? What would Jesus do? You are committing today to follow the Way of Jesus, as we know him through the gospels—the way of forgiveness, the way of self-sacrifice, the way of nonviolence, the way of love.

Second, the Truth.

Joel Osteen is pastor of Lakewood Christian Church in Houston, Texas. His congregation averages 52,000 people a week in attendance. Why? He promises that if you follow Jesus then your life will go well, God will

protect you, and God will *prosper* you...money! *Joel Osteen* is prospering... to the tune of millions of dollars a year.

But he also is lying. At least if the Bible is true.

As you know, we have been following the Narrative Lectionary readings since January. Today's assigned reading just happens to be perfect for Confirmation Sunday. It is the story of Stephen in Acts 6 and 7. We'll look at it in more depth next week. Stephen is one of the first seven deacons, those set apart to take care of the poor and the widows among the early followers of Jesus. We pick up the story at chapter 6, verse 8.

<sup>8-10</sup> *Stephen, brimming with God's grace and energy, was doing wonderful things among the people, unmistakable signs that God was among them. But then some men from the (local religious meeting place) ... went up against him trying to argue him down. But they were no match for his wisdom and spirit when he spoke.*

<sup>11</sup> *So in secret they bribed men to lie: "We heard him cursing Moses and God."*

<sup>12-14</sup> *That stirred up the people....*

*Then the Chief Priest said, "What do you have to say for yourself?"*

<sup>2-3</sup> *Stephen replied, (with a long recitation of the history of Israel, showing how Jesus was the fulfillment of the Jewish hopes for a messiah, but that they didn't see it and so instead of following Jesus, they killed him. Stephen concluded this way.)*

*"You stiff-necked people, so bullheaded! Calluses on your hearts, flaps on your ears! You are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. <sup>52</sup> ... Your ancestors killed all the prophets who dared talk about the coming of the Just One. And you've kept up the family tradition—traitors and murderers, all of you. You had God's Law handed to you by angels—gift-wrapped!—and you squandered it!"*

*(That's pretty direct.)*

<sup>54-56</sup> *At that point (not surprisingly, the crowd) went wild, ...and they dragged him out of town (and pelted him with rocks until he was dead.)*

Perfect confirmation lesson.

We have here a biblical picture of what it sometimes means to follow Jesus. It means if you tell the truth you may be killed. How many disciples were there after Judas killed himself? Eleven. How many of them died of old age? One: John. How did the others die? Every single one was a martyr, the word literally means “witness.” Every single one died for speaking the truth about Jesus.

When Stephen answered the High Priest he didn’t have some sort of death wish. He wasn’t trying to get into trouble. He just decided to tell the truth. Jesus didn’t want to be killed. We certainly see that in his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He just continued to tell the truth, even when he knew it had become dangerous.

Kids, I don’t want any of you to be killed, but I do charge you, as a follower of Jesus, to tell the truth, even if it’s uncomfortable, even if it gets you in trouble.

When somebody makes a “faggot” joke, or a racial slur, I want you to be bold and to speak the truth...the truth that God loves everybody and you won’t stand for that sort of behavior.

When your boss at the plant wants you to send the illegal chemicals into the stream at night under the cover of darkness, I want you to speak the truth...the truth that as a follower of Jesus you need to protect God’s creation, to say no, and you will report your boss to the EPA.

When people clamor for war and revenge, I want you to speak the truth...the truth that our God made known in Jesus is a God of peace, not of violence.

I want you to follow the truth and say “No” to the three or four hundred advertising voices you hear each and every day clamoring for you to buy your way to success and happiness.

Which brings us to the third claim of Jesus: “I am life.” The truth is that having a lot of stuff does NOT bring you happiness. Just watch a few minutes of the reality shows—the Housewives of Orange County, New

York, Miami, London... Wealth, beauty and glamor do not necessarily lead to happiness. Following Jesus is very counter-cultural, that is, most of the things that our society tells you are important and will make you happy, are lies.

We are giving you Bibles today, really cool ones with your name embossed on the cover. Bibles are not intended to sit in a place of honor on your bookshelf and be revered. They are to be read and written in and worn out. And we have already started that process for you. We have written in them and highlighted in them. Your covenant partner, Pastor Mary and I have each highlighted in each of your Bibles our favorite Bible verse. I highlighted John 10:10. Jesus says, "I have come that (my disciples) may have life, and have it abundantly."

That's my deepest desire for you—abundant life!

What a promise by Jesus! Sometimes it's hard to follow Jesus. Occasionally, it's dangerous! Even today. But following Jesus is the way to life, not just fleeting happiness, but true fulfillment and deep-seated joy.

Jesus—the way, the truth, the life.

As I said Tuesday evening when you met with the session, each of you is a remarkable person. I feel so good that you guys are walking the halls of our local schools, for each of you embodies integrity and compassion and the light of God. I look forward with great anticipation to see how you will continue to grow and how God will use you in the years ahead.

Know that we love you and that you will always have a home here in the Oak Grove family. God bless you. Amen.

