

¹³ “Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will know them by their fruits.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you who behave lawlessly.’

²⁴ “Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

²⁸ Now when Jesus had finished saying these words, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹ for he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

About a month ago, I had the privilege of spending 24 hours with Michael, our Teen Time Director, and four of our youth. Devlin, Grace, Carlie, and Katie. These four have been a part of the youth group along with Evelyn, who is another awesome middle schooler, and after attending worship services and taking some of the Presbyterianism 101 classes last year, and engaging in some deep conversations, these four asked for an overnight retreat so that we could spend some intentional time together talking about what confirmation meant. We ate together and played together and discussed theology and church history and scripture and discipleship and our own faith journeys.

At the end of the weekend, it was clear – Grace, who comes with her best friend Devlin, is on a faith journey that is meaningful and growing. She is thoughtful and kind and really good at card games. I'm grateful that she wants to come here, and I'm grateful that her family supports her decision to come, and that Devlin's mom, Margaret, brings her to everything she wants to come to.

Devlin is generous and has a big heart. He is choosing church despite peer pressure from others who tell him that church is stupid. He volunteers to be the worship assistant in church. Some of you adults are too scared to do that! And Devlin has a spiritual gift for feeding the hungry. He shines in the kitchen, and it brings him joy. He is amazing with the elementary school children. I know my son adores Devlin.

And I could talk about Carlie and Katie, but they, they want to speak for themselves today.

The point is, when I asked them if they were ready to confirm their faith, to take on the promises that were made at their baptism with maturity and self-initiated intention, they said yes. And when I asked them when they wanted to do this, they asked, "when is the next 9 o'clock service? We want the whole church to be there when we do this. We want to make these promises in front of everyone. It would be more special."

Now, technically, what the constitution of the church says is that they have to answer four questions, and they did so on Tuesday night before the church elders. They said, “I do. I do. I will. I will.” Just three separate words. Four sentences. It sounds relatively easy, but Jesus says, “For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life.” Shouldn’t confirmation be a little tougher? Some of you had to go through confirmation classes that lasted anywhere from nine months to three years! Some of you had to memorize scriptures and prayers. Some of you had to take written examinations. Or do a research paper. Now that’s a harder road!

Well, I promise, I spoke with them at length about how easy these questions are, but how difficult it is to *live* the answers. What they are promising will require a deep commitment and investment of their very lives. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is going to push them out of their comfort zones at times. It will mean that they are called to see others the way God sees them, not as the world sees them. It will mean that they become full members of this church with all the rights and responsibilities that come with it. And it will mean that they are called to love, especially when it is hard to love.

Confirmation is not about earning a golden ticket to heaven today that becomes a free ride through life. Instead, they’re choosing the narrow gate and the hard road. Jesus says, “Take up your cross and follow me.” The Jesus Way is not the path that buys us a life of privilege and luxury. But it is the path that leads to true, meaningful life. It’s the path that creates a strong foundation that will help them weather the storms of life.

So, Devlin, Carlie, Katie, will you come and stand in front of the table here? Devlin and Carlie were baptized as infants. Their parents made promise on their behalf. The two of them are ready now to take on the promises for themselves – to make their own choices. Katie was baptized two years ago, right over there. But, as Katie will explain later, she has grown and matured a lot, and she wants everyone to know that she has a better understanding now of what it means to follow Jesus. She wants to reaffirm her faith.

Since the questions are identical, I’ll ask you all at the same time.

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world? In other words, do you turn away from the sources of hate and toward the source of love? Do you turn away from selfishness and toward selflessness? Do you turn away from greed and toward generosity? Do you?

Do you turn to Jesus Christ, accepting him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love? In other words, do you commit to being what the earliest Christians were called – followers of the Way of Jesus Christ? Do you?

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love? In other words, will you do what is difficult – putting others first, loving not just your friends and family but the ones that are hard to love? This is not an easy question. Will you be Jesus's student and follow his teachings?

And finally, will you devote yourself to the church's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers? In other words, even though Dunn's Corners Community Church is not perfect, and no church is, will you be an active member here – using your whole self to grow mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually? Will you?

Now, I'd like to invite everyone who loves these three amazing and brave and smart and kind young adults to come forward and surround them with all your energy and love and promise of prayerful support for them as they continue to grow here.

God of life and love, we surround Devlin and Carlie and Katie because we are proud of them. They have chosen You. Not because their families expect it of them, but because they believe that even though following Jesus is demanding, it leads to life and love. We give thanks for their curiosity and courage and pray for their continued growth in faith. We thank you for the other members of the youth group who support and encourage them, and for their families and friends who do the same.

Let this moment be forever etched in their minds and hearts. Let them forever remember our joy and our promise to be their spiritual family, to surround them with God's kind of love. Amen.

Please go back to your seats now.

I'm going to turn the microphone over now to Carlie and Katie who want to share personal messages about their confirmation to you.

[Carlie] Good morning everyone, for those who may not know me, my name is Carlie, and I am so excited to stand before you as I take this step of confirmation.

My faith journey has not always looked the way it does today. Growing up, I attended many different churches. Church was something I went to because it was what we did, but if I'm being honest, there was a time when I didn't really enjoy it. I never imagined that one day church would become one of the places I look forward to being every week.

That changed when I came to Dunn's Corner Presbyterian Church.

At first, I didn't know exactly what to expect, but over time this church became so much more than just a place I attended on Sundays. It became a place where I felt welcomed, accepted, and loved. It became a place where I found genuine friendships, meaningful conversations, and a community that feels like family.

One of the biggest reasons I want to be confirmed is because my faith is now something I have chosen for myself. As I got older, I started coming to church because I wanted to be here, not because someone told me I had to be. Through that choice, I discovered how important my relationship with God is and how much I value being part of this church community.

What makes Dunn's Corner special to me is the people. Every week I look forward to coming here. Whether it's worship, youth group, special events, volunteer opportunities, or simply seeing familiar faces, this church has become a place where I know I belong.

Some of my favorite memories have come from youth group. The friendships I've made here mean so much to me. In fact, Katie and I joke all the time that whenever something exciting, funny, or crazy happens in our lives, one of the first things we say is, "I can't wait to tell the youth about this." That says a lot about what this group means to us. Youth isn't just another activity on the calendar. It's a community of people who celebrate with each other, support each other, and genuinely care about what's happening in one another's lives.

There have been so many moments that have helped me grow in my faith. Whether it was a lesson that made me think differently, a conversation with a friend, a retreat, or simply seeing the kindness and faithfulness of people in this church, God has used those experiences to shape who I am.

This church has taught me that faith isn't just something you talk about on Sundays. It's something you live every day. It's found in kindness, service, friendship, and showing up for one another when life is difficult. Through this community, I've seen what it means to love others and be apart of a community

Confirmation is important to me because it is my opportunity to publicly say that this faith is mine. It is a chance for me to affirm the promises that were made for me and to commit myself to continuing to grow in my relationship with God.

I know my faith journey is still ongoing. I don't have all the answers, and I know there will be challenges ahead. But I also know that God has been guiding me every step of the way, and I am grateful for a church family that has helped me grow into the person I am today.

Thank you to everyone in this congregation who has invested in us youth, encouraged me, prayed for me, and welcomed me. Thank you to Mary and Michael for always showing up for us, Pastor Gin, friends, and everyone here who has helped me along the way. Your support has meant more than you know.

Dunn's Corners Community Church, Presbyterian will always hold a special place in my heart because it is the place where faith became real to me, where I found a community I love, and where I chose for myself to continue walking with God. Thank you.

[Katie] Before I begin my short speech, I would like to start by saying thank you. Thank you to all the people I see before me who have been so generous, not only to me, but also to the other youth who have become a part of this church over the past few years.

As some of you may know, I was baptized here in this sanctuary just about two years ago. At the time, I was told to simply say "I do" and "I will" to all the questions that were asked of me. While I meant those words, I didn't completely understand what promises I was making to this church.

Although I believed in some form of God growing up, it wasn't until sixth grade that I truly understood what it meant to come to church. For most of my life, my dad never forced my older brother Kyle and me to attend church or follow any specific religion. So when I came to a Christmas service here with my dad, I was almost blown away.

You know that feeling when you walk into a room, and it's just so warm and welcoming? Like when someone you haven't seen in a long time runs up to you and gives you the biggest hug?

Yeah... That's exactly what I felt when I stepped foot in this church, and it's one of the biggest reasons I love it so much. Ever since then, I've found opportunities and relationships that I never would have come across otherwise.

The youth group here is something that has changed my life tremendously. It has been a safe place for me to talk about my feelings, especially when my parents were divorcing in sixth grade. Then, through experiences like Montreat, Confirmation retreats, and church groups, all the pieces started to come together, and I began to understand what it really meant to walk with God.

Even now, I find myself reflecting on things I learned there—the mountaintop moments, the moments in the valley, and even the times when you feel stuck somewhere in between.

Believe it or not, patience is still one of the biggest lessons I still carry with me. Every morning, I look at the star I was given there, and it feels like a constant reminder to slow down and trust the process.

But life is meant to be full of ups and downs. After all, what would anything mean if you didn't have to work just a little bit for it?

Just this year, I attended a church group at my school called the Selah Club. We spent two days each week diving into Proverbs, the Parables, and the stories of different biblical figures. The things I learned there began to spill into my conversations with the youth group—words of wisdom and encouragement that I wish I had heard when I was going through some of my darkest moments.

But it wasn't until I opened myself up to these opportunities and truly started looking to God for guidance that I realized what those questions I answered so long ago really meant.

So yes, when I said those words two years ago, I truly meant them. But now, when I recite them again, I understand the meaning behind them. I understand that it is my choice to reaffirm my faith and to recommit myself to the promises I made as I continue walking my path with the Lord.

It's funny the way God teaches us sometimes. Often, we don't recognize our blessings until we've made it through the hardest parts. In the moments when I find myself drifting away from God for my own selfish reasons, I remember the promise I made to Him—not just two years ago, but again today. I can stand firm in that decision and trust that when I fall, He is there, helping me get back up and continue moving forward.

So here I stand and say confidently that beyond what is visible on the surface, no one's walk with God is perfect. Despite the hardships and the struggles we all face every day, I trust in Him, trust in His plan, and strive to strengthen my relationship with Him each day moving forward. Thank you.

Friends, the majority of Millennials and Gen Z speak of organized religion as an outdated set of beliefs. Anti-science, anti-equality, stuffy, and hypocritical on the one hand or charismatically cultish on the other.

But we have a church that values worshipping joyfully with voice, and organ, and piano, and bells. And we have a deep and impactful commitment to care for our neighbors in need. We have children learning how to ring chimes in order to lead us all in worship, and we have these young people who have said, “Though the church is not perfect, it is a safe place for us, and it feels authentic. We’re allowed to express doubts and have our own opinions. This church doesn’t demand blind obedience, but it does challenge us. It doesn’t seek to silence us. It praises us when we speak. It does want us to do things the way they’ve always been done; it wants us to express our own gifts. And Jesus is the role model we want to follow.”

Jesus said, “Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise one who built their house on [a] rock.” This church has been choosing the narrow path and the firm foundation for over seventy-five years. We have been prioritizing dynamic worship and selfless service. May our personal homes, and our spiritual home here, withstand every storm that will come our way and may we have endurance for the journey to come. Amen.