

WHY WALK WHEN YOU CAN FLY?

²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31, NRSV)

Dear Vivian, Bridget, David, Tommy, Anthony, Will, Richard, Whitney, Melissa, Samantha, and D'Arcy,

I write this Epistle of Jimmy to offer my congratulations on your Confirmation. We've come a long way together since beginning our Confirmation journey back in September and now it's time to celebrate. I'm fully aware that none of you will miss showing up at 8:45 on Sunday mornings for class. And while Chase and I would never have made it to class without being caffeinated, we will miss our weekly gatherings. We loved hearing your fresh impressions of the Bible stories and theology. I appreciate how this year's girls were appropriately outraged at history's treatment of Eve and Abraham's treatment of Sarah. I'll always remember the Confirmand several years ago, who shall remain nameless, who evaluated my sermon about Jesus chasing the moneychangers out of the temple. When answering the question, "What did you learn from this sermon?" he answered, "At times Jesus could be quite unpleasant." Hopefully I've taught you more about Jesus

than that! You were a fun class who knew when to laugh and when to be serious.

One thing I hope you learned this year, if you didn't know it before now, is that you are important to Chase and me, and we hope you will always feel comfortable giving us a call or dropping by our offices to tell us what's going on in your life, to share a funny story, or to talk about something that worries you. Wherever you go and whatever you do, always know that we will be your ministers and your friends.

This day is a milestone for you. All of us have milestone moments in our lives—our first day of school, the day we get our driver's license, our Senior Prom, our wedding day. In the same manner, our lives are marked by religious milestones—the day we're baptized, our first day of Sunday School, the day we receive our Bibles on Christian Education Sunday, our first PF mission trip. Today ranks as another such milestone—Confirmation Sunday.

I offer you my most heart-felt congratulations on making the decision to be Confirmed, for Confirmation at its best is more than an 8 month class with homework, a retreat, and a concluding worship service. While all of the outward trappings play an important role in Confirmation, it's the inward faith that matters most. The purpose of Confirmation is not to add more names to our membership roles. Rather, the purpose is to educate your minds and nurture your hearts in the Christian faith that you might make a lasting commitment to God as revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In other words, Confirmation is about encouraging you to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself. After reading your papers and speaking individually with you, I feel that together we've made great progress in what will be your lifelong journeys of faith.

It's no secret that the 2003-04 Confirmation class was an experiment for Chase and me. We took a new approach to homework, which included one of our favorite aspects of life—music. And so we sent you on Internet searches for the lyrics to Bob Marley's song "Exodus" and had you read an introduction to the Book of Psalms written by U2 band member, Bono. As a continuation of this direction, I chose today's sermon title from a Mary Chapin Carpenter song. I'm 99.9% positive that none of you have ever heard of Mary Chapin Carpenter, and I seriously doubt that you would even like the song if I played it for you because it comes out of the folk tradition. When I was in the 8th grade, I would have hated the song too. I still remember the family radio wars of my youth. We would pile in the family station wagon, and I would immediately insist that the radio be set on my favorite rock station. My sister would vie for the pop station; and my Dad, who unfortunately had the final say, tuned both of us out and kept it right where it was—on his country/western station. This was before the invention of the Walkman, so my sister and I spent many a summer mile groaning our distaste for such songs as "Please Bypass This Heart" and "I Liked You Better Before I Knew You So Well."

The song I chose for today has nothing in common with the twangy tunes I was subjected to as a kid. The lyrics of Mary Chapin Carpenter's, "Why Walk When You Can Fly" are inspirational, and remind me of today's scripture lesson from Isaiah 40. Both the song and the biblical text speak of walking and flying. Both speak to real life situations of tragedy, oppression, and sadness. The setting of chapter 40 of Isaiah finds the Southern Kingdom of Israel, known as Judah, in exile, captives of Babylon. The people mourned the plundered temple and their forcible removal from the Promised Land. Many of the prophets of this period uttered nothing but doom and gloom. Ezekiel cried out, "How are we to go on living?" (Ezekiel 33:10) while

Jeremiah lamented, “There is none to comfort me” (Lamentations 1:2). The writer of this portion of Isaiah took a different tack, finding hope and encouragement despite present difficulties. I like that while the prophet acknowledges the harsh reality of the present situation, he looks ahead in faith and anticipation.

Similarly, Mary Chapin Carpenter views the world’s difficulties within the context of hope and optimism. She sings:

*In this world there’s a whole lot of trouble
In this world there’s a whole lot of pain
In this world there’s a whole lot of trouble but
A whole lot of ground to gain
Why take when you could be giving
Why watch as the world goes by
It’s a hard enough life to be living
Why walk when you can fly*

*In this world there’s a whole lot of sorrow
In this world there’s a whole lot of shame
In this world there’s a whole lot of sorrow
And a whole lot of ground to gain
When you spend your whole life wishing
Wanting and wondering why
It’s a long enough life to be living
Why walk when you can fly*

In your papers, several of you made reference to our world’s present troubles. Confirmand Anthony LoSchiavo wrote, “I know that the people of my generation face many challenges. This is a very troubled time for our world and especially our country.” Anthony’s right. While there has never been a utopian era in America, many of us look back at the 1990’s and realize how good we had it. While there was unrest and economic difficulties abroad, America of the 90’s seems like a world away from our present situation. And yet

as bad as things seem at the moment, we have reason to hope. Anthony continues, “I know in my heart that if we stop to listen to God (and I am sure He has a lot to say right now) and accept Him into our lives, we can accomplish many things, especially peace. I believe my generation is up for this challenge.” I applaud those of you in the Confirmation class who share Anthony’s idealism and optimism. We do need to listen to God for direction and words of encouragement.

We find direction and encouragement in the words of the prophet Isaiah who wrote: “The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. God does not faint or grow weary; God’s understanding is unsearchable. God gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:28b-31 adapted). Isaiah admits that even the strongest among us grow weak and weary at some point in life. However, God never grows weak or weary. Isaiah’s solution is for people to wait, trust, have faith in God. Just because we are weak and weary at the moment does not mean that we will be forever. In fact, Isaiah promises that with God’s help we can again learn to walk, run, and fly. These words offer hope to us both individually and globally. With God’s help there is hope for a better day if we are willing to do things God’s way.

Mary Chapin Carpenter concludes her song with a positive, uplifting message:

*In this world there’s a whole lot of golden
In this world there’s a whole lot of plain
In this world you’ve a soul for a compass
And a heart for a pair of wings*

*There's a star on the far horizon
Rising bright in an azure sky
For the rest of the time that you're given
Why walk when you can fly*

Today as you commit yourselves to following God's way of love and service to others, commit yourselves as well to following God's hopes and dreams for you. If you look for the beauty and possibilities of each day, your spirit can soar. If you seek to find God's purpose and direction for your life you will be amazed at the difference you can make in our world. Confirmation class is over, but your faith journey has just begun. It's a journey where you'll use your soul for a compass, and your heart for a pair of wings. Why walk when, with God's help, we can fly? AMEN.

Grace and Peace,
Jimmy

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PASTORAL PRAYER

Loving God, through your Son, Jesus Christ, you call us all to become followers of your way. And yet we are not capable of following you alone. We need your help to become the people you would have us be. On this Confirmation Sunday challenge us to rededicate our lives to the teachings and example of Jesus, that we might be faithful disciples. Today we celebrate the decision that Vivian, Bridget, David, Tommy, Anthony, Will, Richard, Whitney, Melissa, Samantha, and D'Arcy have made "Increase in them [and in us] the gifts of your Holy Spirit...love for others, joy in [service], peace in disagreement, patience in suffering, kindness toward all people, goodness in evil times, faithfulness in temptation, gentleness in the face of opposition, [and] self-control in all things" (*U.C.C. Book of Worship*, p. 151). Strengthen us all for the tasks you have given.

Thank you, O God, for people like our Confirmands who are willing to commit their lives to you and your cause. Through Jesus Christ we pray. AMEN.