

It goes without saying, this is a special day in the life of our church. For many months, these seven people received into membership today have undergone a rigorous examination of the faith under Pastor Dan’s tutelage and with the important assistance of Kristin and Joanne.

If you have any questions about such things as the Trinity, or transubstantiation, or premillennial dispensationalism, I’m sure they’ll be available after worship for questions. Today, they went from being preparatory members to being full members of First Parish Church. Therefore, my message today is going to take the form of a charge to the Confirmands and to the congregation as a whole.

I’m sure the confirmands know this, but I’ll say it for the benefit of all of you. It is widely believed the author of Luke’s Gospel also wrote the book of Acts. At the end of Luke, Jesus was crucified and resurrected. There was a period of 40 days, after the resurrection, in which Jesus appeared to his disciples.

In the beginning of Acts, Jesus is about to ascend into heaven. His earthly ministry was complete. It was time to join God in the heavenly realm and entrust the work to his followers. For three years, they followed him, receiving instruction, and learning from him. Now, it was their turn. We might call it a passing of the baton.

And what’s the first thing Jesus tells them to do after he leaves them? Wait. He told them to stay right where they were. They were not to do anything until they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. In fact, if you’ve ever seen a relay race, you know each runner begins by waiting for the baton to come around the track. In a race, you don’t run without the baton. The disciples were not to begin their ministry without having received the Holy Spirit.

If the disciples were to go off without the assistance of Spirit, depending on their own wisdom, their own strength, and their own resources it probably would’ve been a disaster. Therefore, they were to wait until they receive the Holy Spirit. This leads me to my first charge which is to strive to live a spirit-filled life.

To live a Spirit filled life is to have access to divine assistance. There will be times in your life when you don’t know which direction to take. The Spirit can guide you. You might not have the strength to cope with every hardship you face. To live a Spirit-filled life is to have

access to a power greater than your own. In life, it's not always easy to determine right from wrong. In those instances, the Spirit can provide wisdom and insight.

Let me put it this way. You know that, eventually, you have to recharge your phone. Your laptop or your tablet can only go so long before you have to plug it into a power source. The Holy Spirit is your power source and your number one task is to stay plugged in through worship, prayer, study, service, and fellowship. Many choose to live a banal, mundane existence, but there's no life like a Spirit-filled life.

In the reading today, Jesus told his followers, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This brings me to my second charge to the confirmands, which is to be a witness for Jesus.

That probably sounds daunting. In fact, witnessing to Jesus, or evangelism, is not the element of the faith with which many of us New England Protestants are most comfortable. I could be wrong, but I'm guessing, as they went through the Confirmation process, our confirmands didn't make a habit of sitting down at the lunch table in school and say to their friends, "You'll never guess what pastor Dan taught us in Confirmation yesterday. Let me tell you about Jesus." They probably didn't say grace for everybody, right there in the cafeteria. "Let's bow our heads, everyone."

Being able to talk about one's faith is a way to witness to Jesus, but I believe another way to be Jesus' witnesses is by treating people the way he did. Jesus befriended outcasts and those that others persecuted. We can witness to Jesus by spending time with his friends, by standing with the person getting bullied at school, by including those that others would exclude.

Let me suggest this. In a relay race, there is a zone in which the baton can be passed. In that zone the previous runner and the next runner sort of match strides as the baton is being passed. In other words, they run together. As you receive the baton from those of us who have been running with it for some time, run with us.

Join us in our ministries. This church witnesses to Jesus by serving those in need here in York. But we serve people in all kinds of places. You might join us for a future service trip some place far from here. Those are often life defining experiences. We witness to Jesus by spending time with his friends both near and far.

My charge to you is first, to live a Spirit-filled life. Secondly, be a witness for Jesus. Lastly, make this congregation your home. Everyone needs a home away from home. I've

shared this before. My dad was a church pastor. His parents both died by the time he was five years old. He spent his childhood sleeping on the couch in his Aunt Harriet's apartment. When I asked him why he became a pastor, he said, "When I was growing up, the church was my family. I never wanted to be anything else." All this to say, sometimes in life, we need an extended family.

My charge to you is to make this place your home and to think of all these people as an extended family. It's amazing what being part of something larger than yourself can do. We crave community. There's an African proverb that says: "If you want to go fast go alone; if you want to go far go together."

Recently, I listened to a Christian teacher and preacher named Christine Cane. She preaches all over the world in stadiums packed with tens of thousands of people. She was responding to comments in which folks were saying that participation in a local church isn't necessary. Some say that, with all we can access on the Internet, there's no need for local churches.

She explained how important church membership has been for her. She said, "I've been in ONE church for 31 years. "You wonder why I'm here today? I submitted [to a local church] 31 years ago. It hasn't hindered what God has wanted to do in and through my life; it's the vehicle through which I've been released into the purpose that God has for my life."

So, to the confirmands I say live a Spirit-filled life.

Be a witness for Jesus.

And make First Parish Church your home.

My charge to the congregation is simply this. Allow this church to be changed by these new members. Every time new members are received, it should change us. They have their own ideas. They have their own skills and experiences. They have their own way of doing things. They can lead us into new ways of being the church. Trust that the Holy Spirit can work as mightily in the next generation as it did in past generations.

To you seven confirmands, today we pass the baton. And I can't wait to see you run.