

Be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election ... (2 Peter 1:10)

Confirmation is a very peculiar practice. That might be strange for you to read, but it's true. Actually, there might be a lot that surprises you about the history of Confirmation. First, there is no set age for Confirmation. In fact, Confirmation isn't ever commanded in the Scriptures! Instead, the rite of Confirmation didn't show up in Church history until the eighth century – over 700 years after Jesus died, rose, and ascended! This doesn't make Confirmation bad in itself, of course, but it also means that Christians operated without it in most places for hundreds – even well over 1,000 – years.

We should also know that, unlike in the Roman Church, Confirmation is not a sacrament. This means that it was neither instituted by Jesus nor does it impart on us the forgiveness of sins. The main problem in medieval theology (and in modern Roman theology) is that Confirmation came to be considered on the same level as Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The way Confirmation was thought of was essentially as filling in for what Baptism missed. But, what does Baptism miss? Nothing! In Baptism we are washed with the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), clothed with Christ's righteousness (Galatians 3:27), adopted as God's children (Ephesians 1:5), crucified, buried, and raised to new life with Christ (Romans 6). Confirmation became so elaborate, misleading, and useless in medieval times that Luther himself wanted to get rid of it altogether. He even called the rite of Confirmation “monkey business” (*Affenspiel*), “fanciful deception” (*Lügenstand*), and “mumbo-jumbo!” (*Gaukelwerk*). Confirmation as we know it today is really descended from the pietistic movements in the centuries after the original reformers – which is certainly nothing in its favor.

Yet, Confirmation persists in one form or another to this very day. Why? The first reason is that Luther (and others) permitted it “as long as it is understood that God knows nothing of it, and has said nothing about it, and that what the bishop claims for it is untrue.” Instead, Lutherans confessed that Confirmation could be retained as a “rite inherited from the Fathers, which even the church does not require as necessary to salvation.” But the second, more important reason is that Confirmation has become synonymous with the teaching and preparation required of all Christians by our Lord Jesus. Along with baptizing, our Lord commanded that his apostles make disciples by *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you* (Matthew 28:18–20). Christians should always be hearing and learning God's Word. This is true especially before any Christians receives the Lord's Supper. Lutherans confess that people should only receive the Supper “after first having been instructed and examined. For men are taught concerning the true use of the Sacrament that it was instituted for the purpose of being a seal and testimony of the free remission of sins, and that, accordingly, it ought to admonish alarmed consciences to be truly confident and believe that their sins are freely remitted.” Confirmation, then, has served as the customary way of instructing and examining those wanting to receive the Lord's Supper.

For our 150th anniversary celebration, we've decided to focus on Confirmation in March, when there will be special attention on God's work done in the instruction and preparation of many people over many years. This will culminate in the rite of Confirmation for 10 young people at Immanuel on Palm Sunday. It won't be a Sacrament. It won't be graduation from church (God forbid!). But, it will be a day to remember our Baptisms into Christ, as well as all that God has done for us in Christ. It will be a day to celebrate what God continues to give to us through his Word. It will be a day to rejoice in the knowledge and unity that comes in being able to celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar together. And it will be a day to look forward to *continued* learning of God's Word!

-Pastor Squire

“Sustain the work You have begun in these united to Your Son, for in that pure baptismal flood they have been cleansed by Jesus' blood.”

(“O Gracious Lord, with Love Draw Near,” *LSB* 599, v. 2)