

# CONFIRMED

March 28, 2010 – 8 a.m.

Texts – Psalm 31: 9 - 16  
Philippians 2: 5 - 11

“Please confirm your reservation 72 hours prior to departure . . .” “Sonia Sotomayor’s nomination to the Supreme Court was confirmed last month . . .” “A new study has confirmed Einstein’s theory of relativity . . .” “Microsoft confirmed today that the next generation of the Zune portable media player . . .”

Confirmed. It means to establish the truth or correctness of something; to state with assurance that something is true. In our tradition, it means to affirm your belief and be admitted as a full member of the Church. Six of our young people will be confirmed today.

I baptized some of them, I’m proud to say. Hard to believe now that I paraded them around our sanctuary just fourteen years ago, easily holding them in my arms. It would be impossible to do today.

“People don’t change,” we sometimes say. “What you see is what you get.” Wrong! Change is the very essence of life in all of its forms; it most definitely is the sum and substance of human life. “*My times are in thy hand,*” the old Psalmist says. [Psalm 31: 15] Why? Because only the hand of God can encompass the multiple shapes and sizes that characterize not just our physical bodies but our spiritual selves.

So six young people come today to be confirmed, and in our celebration of that we will join them and their families in celebrating the beauty so abundantly visible in their growth and development as young women and men. They aren’t done yet, of course . . . none of us are! But we see in them, as hopefully they can and do in each of us, a foreshadowing not just of what will be but also of what has always been. We are, each of us, children of God – created in the image,

the likeness, of God. That is the old truth to which our tradition bears witness.

We talk about that in our Confirmation program. We read the passage from the book of Genesis, the first chapter, the twenty-seventh verse –

*“So God created man (a’dam) in God’s own image, in the image of  
God God created him; male and female God created them.”*

And we take some time with that word “image.” It comes from the Hebrew term, tsehlem, which has its root in the term tsehlel, meaning “shadow.” To be created in the tsehlem of God is to recognize in one’s self the tsehlel, the shadow, of God. My shadow reflects my physical being, but not exactly . . . not precisely. It is distorted, depending upon its proximity to the source of light around me for its very being. Just so am I and are you reflective of God’s being. We are like God’s shadow; each one of us reflecting (presenting) a portion of the Holy One’s uniqueness, the accuracy of which depends upon our proximity to the Divine Reality. “*Now we see in a mirror dimly,*” is the way Paul puts it;

*“one day we shall see face to face. Now we know in part; one day  
we shall understand fully, even as we have been fully understood.”*

[I Corinthians 13: 12]

So today we gather to confirm, to state with assurance, what we know to be true – that we are each beloved children of God, created in and reflective of God’s image. None of us are “done” in the sense of “finished” or “whole” or “complete.” Each of us, like these six, are works in progress. Each of us has yet a long way to go. For this moment (only) can we take a snap shot or portrait . . . we pause and look around . . . and we marvel at the beauty and the joy and the profundity of it all.

What message, I asked myself earlier this week, ought we offer these young people as they are confirmed? Is there something they absolutely need to know on a day like this? I think

there is. I'm not certain, to tell you the truth, that talking with them about it this morning is going to do any good. I'm quite sure that none of them have any memory whatsoever of what was said on the day of their baptisms. I doubt their parents do either. Tell you the truth, I don't remember and I'm the one who was speaking. Whatever it was I'm sure it was wonderful (!), but I've forgotten. Chances are pretty good that the same thing will one day be true of what we're doing today.

But I feel like I have to talk with them about this anyway, because it's the main thing that causes so much pain and suffering in people's lives. It has to do with that tsehlem business I mentioned a moment ago, that business about each of us being created in the image of God. There's a world of difference between being "the" image of God and being "an" image or tsehlel of God. A world of difference. Oh, it doesn't sound like much, does it? Maybe just "this much" . . . tsehlem or tsehlel – they almost sound the same, don't they? But there's literally "hell to pay" between the two.

Start with tsehlem, the image of God. What's that mean? How's that play out in a person's life? Well it can mean that the persons we are, the creatures we experience ourselves to be, are awesome and beautiful and sacred and even divine in the best sense of all those words. It can mean that we're important, that our lives do matter, and that we deserve to be loved and respected and even cherished. Everyone of those phrases applies to each and every person in this room. It applies to you, but you aren't the only one. I'm important too. My life matters too. I deserve to be loved and respected and cherished too. And so does she. And so does he. "*In the image of God God created him,*" the old scripture says; "*male and female God created them.*"

Tsehlem . . . the image of God . . . the likeness of God. Yes that's who you are and it's who I am and it's who all of us are. And that's a wonderful blessing. That's a liberating and freeing realization when it finally sinks in. But it is also so dangerous, because it is so easy to go

from there to “I’m the most important” . . . “I’m the main thing” . . . “It really is all about me” . . . “I’m like God” . . . “I’m God like.”

Not very pretty, is it? When we encounter that kind of attitude in another person, we have all kinds of words we can use to describe them. Some of the softer ones are “conceited, self-centered, egotistical;” some of the harsher ones are “tyrannical, despotic, pathological.” That’s why it’s so important to remember that other word – tsehlel. Yes you are in the image of God, but that image is like a shadow – it is and always will be an in-exact, imperfect reflection of the One who is above all and in all and through all things. And those who are around you, who share this fragrantly fragile and beautiful earth with you, are also tsehlel . . . they too reflect the radiance and majesty and wonder of God.

There are two passages in our Bible which were written for days like this – days when young people affirmed their belief and were admitted as full members of the Church. The first, chronologically speaking, is the one we read for our New Testament lesson this morning.

*“Have this mind (this attitude) among yourselves, which you have (which you can see) in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God (the likeness of God, the image of God, tsehlem), did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself. . . . And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him.” [Philippians 2: 5-7a, 8-9a]*

Can you hear in that this critical distinction?

Here’s a second one. It’s from the letter we call Second Timothy. “*To Timothy, my beloved child,*” it begins.

*“I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience ... when I*

*remember you constantly in my prayers.... I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and [which] now, I am sure, dwells in you. Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you ... for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.” [II Timothy 1: 2-3, 5-7]*

Pay attention to that last word – “self-control.” Yes we are, each of us, tsehlem . . . created in the image of God. Yes, there is wondrous beauty and wisdom and power and love within each of us. But we must learn to use self-control. We must practice exercising self-control. Being found in human form, it is incumbent on each of us that we “*humble ourselves and become obedient*” to something greater than ourselves . . . that we remember, in other words, that we are the tsehlel (the shadow) of God.

Confirmed. It means to establish the truth or correctness of something; to state with assurance that something is true. We do that with words on special days, but most of all we do it by and through the lives we lead. May God give us the grace to reflect His image throughout our days. Amen.