

Rubbish
“Stick around.”
Joshua 24:14-15

Heart Strings: Lessons for relationships from the Ancient Heroes #2

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No Consequence

I once eavesdropped on a rather public conversation and I'm still haunted by what I heard. I was visiting a church one early June on the Sunday they recognized their graduating high school seniors when I heard couple of them talking: "Melanie, I didn't know you belonged to this church!" "Oh, yeah; but I haven't been here since...um...Confirmation." "Yeah, me too."

I felt so sad (in fact, I still do) because for them, Confirmation had no consequence. It had made no difference as far as they knew. Four or five years after kneeling at the altar, and they had not worshipped. They hadn't joined in making a difference in the world, nor had they had the fun or formed deep friendships with a church family they had said they were going to love.

God has a way of working through church relationships to form our souls, equip us for living, and find our direction. Some of the seniors that day were oblivious, or didn't care. And why?

The Event and the Eventuality

Back when the world was first paved to connect cities and villages across civilization, the Roman Empire made a point of establishing an organized road system. A statue of Caesar Augustus in Rome was made the center, and all roads led to it. Then, from that point they measured the distance on each of the roads, counting a thousand steps to make each mile; then they placed stone markers at each of the mile points, chiseling into the rock the distance it was from Rome. These posts were called *Milestones*, and by them the travelers would mark the progress of their journeys.

Since then we've come to call significant, scheduled life events *milestones*. Your baptism, if you were baptized as a child, was a milestone. So was your first day of kindergarten. So will be your sixteenth birthday and perhaps get your permanent license to drive; then, when you turn eighteen and are eligible to vote. Each is a milestone in its own right when you leave something of childhood behind and take on

more of the responsibility of an adult. Each of these points is an occasion to mark the time; to look back and consider your journey as it has been lived and also to look forward and plot the trip ahead.

Confirmation is such a milestone. Our youth have come a long way from the time when, one way or another, their parents presented them before God, making decisions for them about what they were going to believe and what their relationship with God would be like. Perhaps, the journey's been peppered with lessons from Sunday school, Bible school, and Church On Wednesday, stories of Jesus and heroes of the Faith told at home, prayers prayed before meals and bedtime, and much, much more.

These things happened along the journey so far, fostering growth and understanding. Now they've completed a class in which they considered the important things of faith, what it means to be saved by Jesus, and belong to him. It's a milestone at which they kneel: a turning point when the vows of the Christian faith are taken on as their own.

They are kind of like the Israelites standing at the river's edge long ago. Having journeyed through the wilderness where God worked with them to forge a faithful relationship, and they were about to enter the Promised Land, Joshua gave them an ultimatum. Either choose God and never go back; or go back and serve other gods. You can't have it both ways. And what you choose will make a difference for your whole lives. What are you going to keep? And what are you going to throw out? What will be your precious keepsake, and what will be rubbish? The story goes that the Israelites chose to serve God. They took hold of that which would be priceless, and they left the rubbish of other attachments behind. So, their event became an eventuality: it launched them on a direction that made a difference for the rest of their lives. It was a milestone.

I'm afraid that the seniors I listened to that Graduation Sunday had made the wrong choice. I'm afraid the things they chose to keep were rubbish; and what they apparently left behind was a treasure.

I am concerned about our confirmands four years from now. In four years, when they come back to church to be recognized as graduating seniors and see each other again, will *that* be the next time they see each other here? Or will this event really be a point on their road pointing to the way they live their lives together? Will they receive this blessing as a release to do other things and leave this behind, or will they receive

this blessing as a new beginning of a walk with Jesus and Jesus' people that will fill their lives? It's a matter of commitment: are they going to do and be what they say?

Commitment

You might have heard about the chicken and the pig walking down the road. What a chicken and a pig would be doing together and why they would be walking, unsupervised, down the road I don't know; but they were. When they came near a little country church sided with white clapboard and adorned by a pointy steeple, they read a sign that said, BENEFIT DINNER, FEATURING HAM AND EGGS. COME AS YOU ARE. "Oh, what a wonderful idea!" said the chicken, "Let's stop in!"

"Easy for you to say," said the pig. "For you it's only a contribution; for me, its total commitment!"

Today, we kneel with our confirmands at a milestone, of life. We hear them say they accept Jesus as their Lord and their savior and that they'll belong to him forever. It's an opportunity to renew your promise and say the same thing again with them.

So, at this milestone of life's journey, it's not just the contribution of an hour. I want you to know: this means taking hold of the priceless treasure, leaving the rubbish behind: a total commitment for all of life.