

**“Claiming a Broken Trophy and Clinging to it in the Wild”**  
**Based on Matthew 6:24-34, David Jahnke, 6/1/08**

What a great day for you confirmands! After a long year in which you have put in an incredible amount of time and effort, today it finally comes to an end... Well actually, today it finally comes to a beginning. This may not sound like good news but everything that you have done so far has really been preparation for the life in Christ ahead of you.

I saw a fitting image of that life on the internet the other day. The Spokane Chiefs won the Canadian hockey championship this year. As the team captain was passing the trophy onto his teammate, the cup on the top of the trophy broke off and the whole bottom of the trophy crashed down to the ice. These two young guys were dumb-founded. Their jaws dropped just like the trophy. But after their initial shock, they picked up the two pieces, brought them to their teammates and had a lot of laughs with them as they held up the two pieces.

So today you confirmands are kind of like Spokane Chiefs. You are champions who have won a broken trophy. The trophy is the church which, is an old and broken institution— we are far from perfect here. But the trophy is still yours— and 1. we all need to claim it like the hockey teammates did. 2. We need to be able to laugh at our broken-ness. 3. And rejoice in our victory. 4. We need to hold the church up as a great prize-- as something to be proud of even though it is not the gleaming Stanley Cup of the NHL.

The church is not about what glitters or what is golden anyway. We are all about broken cups-- cups which are leaking and always in need of being re-filled. Jesus talks about one response to the world's brokenness. He said to the crowds, “You cannot serve both God and wealth. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

One response to the fact that we are all broken cups is to try to constantly polish up the outside. And money and all it provides is the polish which helps us feel clean, secure and makes us look good in the eyes of others.

Another form of polishing is keeping everything in order through following rules and norms. One of those norms in Jesus' day was to wash your hands prior to eating. Jesus was once invited into that Pharisees' house to eat but he did not wash his hands in the basin which shocked his host. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said to him, "You Pharisees sure clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness."

Now there obviously is nothing wrong with washing your hands or following rules...nor is there anything inherently wrong with wearing nice clothes and eating fine foods. Jesus is simply saying that all of this polishing can never fix the cracks. And that our concern with putting on a veneer of order and beauty ends up actually filling our life with a lot of worry... Worry over we do and say; worry about what we eat and drink; worry about

what others think about what us. Jesus tells us that we are good to the core and absolutely beautiful because that is how God sees us. God has made us good and beautiful and his love and mercy alone can fix the cracks.

A lot of teenagers realize that polishing the cup does nothing to fix the cracks. But then they swing to the other extreme and magnify the cracks in themselves and others. They intentionally look kind of wild instead of neat and nice. They often exhibit little respect or concern for rules and regulations. They show little interest in the pursuit of money. And, in many ways, they try to escape this world through their music, art—through compulsive internet use or gaming- through their use of drugs and alcohol. (Adults are obviously prone to very similar desires to escape.)

I recently saw a movie about a young man named Christopher McCandless who is an example of both the insight and the tragic flaw of such a response. The movie is *Into the Wild* and I highly recommend it. After Christopher graduated from college, he took the trust that his successful parents had set up for him to go to Law School and he sent it to Oxfam with a note saying, “I hope you can feed a lot of people with this.” Christopher had no interest in pursuing the gods of wealth, power or societal status.

He hit the road in his clunky Datsun and spent a couple years traveling around, camping and taking up occasional odd jobs. He got to know the beauty of the lilies of the fields and the birds of the air...He searched for and started to trust in the beauty within himself. He learned how to till the land on a farm in South Dakota and came to appreciate the abundance of the earth.

In California, he befriended a wise old W.W. II veteran who kept pointing him toward forgiveness as the answer to his search. This new friend tried to point him in the direction of the church as well. But Chris was not ready for that yet, having sensed that the church was no less cracked than the rest of the world.

So he continued his journey away from the world by heading up to Alaska. He hitchhiked to where the roads ended and entered into the Alaskan wilderness with nothing but a rifle, some camping gear, and 10 lbs. of rice. The last man to see him repeatedly tried to persuade Alex to postpone his trip...and offered to drive him to Anchorage to buy the right equipment and supplies, including current maps and a compass. But Chris ignored this wise man’s advice as well and headed into the wild by himself.

While there is much which is admirable about Chris’ journey, there are a couple of tragic flaws as well. Chris sensed that the earth would provide him all that he needed. And he did not worry about what he would wear or what he would eat, both of which follow Jesus’ teaching. But Jesus said, “Strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.” The Kingdom of God is communal not individual; and God’s righteousness means being in right relationship God and with others. So our journey does not escape the broken-ness of the world but enters into it to redeem it with love and mercy.

Most of the time, those who try to escape this world have been deeply hurt in relationships with parents, spouses, teachers, classmates. Chris was hurt by his parents' constant fighting and his father's bigamy. Had Chris sought right relationships, he would have listened to his veteran friend and returned home with forgiveness in his heart. At the least he would have trusted the man who wanted to guide him as he entered the wilderness.

I said at the beginning of this sermon that today is a beginning rather than an end for you. And as you journey, you will see three main paths ahead. One is lined with gold and seeks to cover up the cracks in the road. People on this path pretty much expect perfection and get judgmental whenever cracks appear or walkers fall. Another path branches off into a thousand different directions but they all end in a lonesome and destructive wilderness. The last path acknowledges the cracks. But the people everywhere along this path are there to not only point the cracks out to you but to help you up every time you stumble.

After reading your statements of faith, one thing which hits me is how all of you are clearly on a search just as Christopher McCandless was. Bono from U2 sang the following about his search...

I have climbed the highest mountain  
I have run through the fields  
Only to be with you  
Only to be with you  
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

I believe in the kingdom come  
Then all the colors will bleed into one  
Bleed into one  
Well, yes, I'm still running  
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for ("I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" U2, The Joshua Tree, 1987)

They found Chris' body in an old abandoned bus which he had made his home in the wilderness. A month or so before this, he had written the following in his notebook as he neared death. "I HAVE HAD A HAPPY LIFE AND THANK THE LORD. GOODBYE AND MAY GOD BLESS ALL!"

Despite Chris' tragic mistakes which ended up costing him his young life, it seems that, in the end, he found what he was looking for...Or rather he realized that that he had been found. You have committed yourself today to a continued search for the Kingdom of God.

But what I would really like you to leave with is an assurance that the love of God has found you and will never, ever let you go. So all of us have nothing to worry about and nothing to fear. Our job in the church and now your job too...is to always remind each other of this amazing love by how we treat each other. And to make this love abundantly

clear to the world as well. To the God of all grace, who has called you to eternal glory in Christ Jesus... <sup>11</sup> To God be the power for ever and ever