



It might just have been that Confirmation Sunday was when all of this started for me. The church tried to make it a little more personalized and meaningful for the students' families, and so they had us confirmands take on various roles throughout the worship that morning. And so, the pastor in his...not-so-infinite wisdom decided to ask me to be one of the lectors, reading through one of the Scripture passages from the lectern. Except, at the time, I was absolutely petrified about public speaking. I even did everything in my power not to be called on in school. There would be this

heightened anxiety when the teacher did it anyway, as my voice crackled and struggled to put a few decent-sounding words together. And if I was ever asked to read an entire paragraph from a textbook, it would be a most dreaded nightmare.

Nevertheless, up to the lectern I went on that even more nerve-racking Confirmation Sunday. Now, I don't remember exactly how it went, as I'm sure I immediately attempted to erase it from entering my memory bank, but what I do remember is all of us young people in our little white robes and little carnations pinned on by our shoulder: we gathered in our parlor-equivalent-space behind the sanctuary after the worship, for the obligatory greeting line awaiting the congregation to come along and extend their congratulations and whatever else to us, which is not always the most pleasant experience to put middle schoolers through, to put it mildly. And then, there she was: this woman who went out of her way to come up to me and say, "you might want to think about seminary." I did my obligatory appreciation chuckle, and maybe a verbal thank you or the like thrown in there for good social measure. But deep down, the idea was ludicrous, of course. Why would I want to venture into anything that would promote more frequent public speaking, for starters; let alone, at the time, I was under the impression that pastors had to be perfect, morally-upstanding individuals: an impossible standard that junior high me was by no means interested in at all. But there she was, going out of her way, whether out of kindness or respect or trying to somehow miraculously add someone to the clergy roster down the line or Holy Spirit inspiration or whatever it was; because she went out of her way, those words went out of their way into my spiritual and mental memory bank, and remained entrenched there seemingly never desiring to leave. The nerve on that woman.

And so, as much as today should be about Andrew Revilock and Penelope Havel and Ethan Wells, and the presence of Jesus Christ in all of them, today is also about reminding their Divinity family of a promise we made to each of them. Because, on July 21, 2012, some of you in this room, made a promise to Andrew at his baptism, to support him in his new life in Christ. On February 16, 2013, onlookers in the pews that day, made a promise to give thanks and praise to God for Penelope's inclusion in the body of Christ. And on January 18, 2014, Ethan's church family, promised to help him be part of God's creative and redeeming word to all the world.

Of course, sometimes when the baptisms ensue, we're caught up in other parts of the holy moment. We cherish the cuteness of the child. We marvel over young families in our midst. We cling to the hope of another precious life added to the church. And so when the pastor invites us to do the obligatory speaking part from the hymnal in front of us, we don't always think about the promise God invites us, and encourages us, and inspires us to make for that often infant life who has absolutely no idea what's going on. No idea about all the other people in the room, who go out of their way to throw out words to fill the space of the contagious hope and expectation. No idea that in that moment, the other people in the room are being called to be a second family to them, to be a people they can rely on for trying to figure out this whole God business, to be a place they can

turn to when trying to envision what their faith is going to look like, to be a holy glimpse into a loving and gracious God at moments in their life when they desperately need

So, yes, today should be about Andrew and Penelope and Ethan and the Lord who has setup a most beautiful dwelling place in the very depths of each of their hearts. But today is also a reminder to their church family about the promise we made to them on a day when Christ further ushered them in to a ride of a lifetime. And to remember of the impact you have when you go out of your way and release words of encouragement and support and an emphatic extension of God's love, that may just stick in the spiritual memory bank to never ever leave; to be always mindful that the youth in our midst are not just the future of the church, but very much the present and living body of Christ; the same Jesus Christ who didn't go out of his way to get to us, but instead, insists that we were on the Divine way of love and grace and mercy all along. So, for that Greatest News for Andrew, Penelope, Ethan, and all of us, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!