

20 years ago, I stood up in front of a small country church, 6 miles east of Rice Lake, WI – to affirm faith with my confirmation class. Me and 3 other boys. Rick, Nick, Travis and Eric.

But as much I was wanted to be done with confirmation classes – I wasn't sure I was ready to affirm my faith. I wasn't sure if I wanted to continue with church. Plus – I wasn't crazy about the interim pastor – who had just arrived at our church. He wasn't the pastor with whom I had grown up. I thought about waiting a year until a new pastor came. Maybe I would be ready then.

Often our confirmation celebration day is more for our churches, our family, to make grandma happy, or to graduate and be done with church. Or maybe it is to get our picture into that frame downstairs with confirmation classes all the way back to 1911.

But affirming faith is something that is done every day – not just once in our life. These kids have been affirming faith ever since they repeated the words of the apostle's' creed. Which is why today is another chapter in their life of faith – not the beginning, and not the end.

But an affirmation – God I believe, help my unbelief. God I believe, but I don't understand everything. God I believe, and I know I'm going to need you more and more.

We don't have to have perfect faith to stand up and affirm the gifts and promises and provisions that God delivers to us in Baptism, and which God continues to deliver now. In fact if you thought you had perfect faith, we'd have a talk.

We can say yes God, even if we have doubts, even if the spirit is still stirring faith inside of us. Because God's grace doesn't have requirements or conditions. And we see that all over God's story.

God created creation.

Provided a child to Abraham and Sarah.

Talent to Joseph.

Courage to Moses.

An answered prayer to Hannah.

A house and kingdom for David.

And God required nothing in return.

Praise, and prayers, and songs, and love, and thanksgiving were given as a response to God – but God required nothing.

And to Elijah – God provides. Food from the mouths of Ravens, and water from a dry river bed, and a simple cake from a poor widow. God's ultimate provision never runs out – but we can see that sometimes it changes, or goes unnoticed.

The brook dries up, the ravens leave, the jar of oil and flour eventually will run out, when once rain comes again upon the earth. But even if God's provisions go away – that does not diminish their power and goodness in the moment, or that fact that God will provide again, in a new way, a different way. This is part of the difficult and joyful life of trusting God again, and again, and again.

Because God provides. And provides. And provides. And provides again. From Birth to Death. From Baptism to Resurrection. From old to new.

Do not be afraid. Elijah is faithful, but maybe hesitant. He trusts God, but he must also live on the edge of that trust, that when something else happens, God will again come through.

God isn't going to make you rich. Or make life cushy.

Being God's disciple, celebrating affirmation of faith, will never solve all your problems. But will remind you that God is there, providing.

God provides – makes you a new creation every day.

God provides the word of the Lord – a faith story, not to mention *thee* Word of God in flesh and blood, Jesus Christ.

God provides you a family of faith – the people here at Bristol, but the whole Church across the world and all the way back to Elijah and David, and Adam and Eve.

God provides forgiveness, and life for today, and life eternal.

God provides assurance - that no matter who wins the election in a couple weeks, Jesus will be the one in control.

God provides a stirring – something (the Holy Spirit) stirred you out of bed to be here. Stirred your family to fulfill the baptism promises to bring you to Wednesday night classes.

God provides hope – even in the midst of uncertainty, confusion, question, and chaos.

God provides promise – that the hungry will be fed, and one day there will be no more tears.

God provides reformation, change, transformation – renewal.

God provides – often in a manner that can be surprising or unusual, a dirty raven of all things, a dry wadi, a dying widow.

But maybe God's greatest miracles are that God provides through you and me. Regular everyday people.

God provides for us, so that we be a part of God's provision to others. Like the widow of Zarephath.

Share with each other. Food for the food pantry, change in your pocket, your time and talent. Share yourself. Because God's blessing and power comes in relationship together, as a community and body of Christ, and saints here on earth.

Loving each other, taking care of each other, respecting and accepting one another. In providing and in receiving, we experience the unimaginable power of God, through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the one who makes us new.

20 years ago I stood where you will stand. I still am not sure if I always understand God. I have doubts about God's work in the world. I get tired of church. And God continues to surprise me. And provide. And without God, I couldn't be here now.

Because affirmation of faith happens every day.

And when you forget – come back to this word of God, chosen for you.

Allison, from Psalm 51 – Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Jared from Matthew – You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.

Blaine from Acts – Support the weak, remembering the words of Jesus, it more blessed to give than receive.

Emma, from Matthew – Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.

From baptism to confirmation and to the next chapter, this is your story of faith.

Your faith in God. And God's faith in you.