

# McCabe United Methodist Church

## ***“Critical Decisions”***

1 Timothy 4 (Apr 23, 2017, 10am)  
Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

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Let us Pray:

*Holy and Mighty God, may the words of my mouth, and  
the meditations on each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight.  
You alone are our Rock. You alone are our Redeemer. Amen.*

Did you know there's research that says: The average adult makes 35,000 decisions a day? 35,000! That's a lot!

They say it's in part why people like Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and Apple's Steve Jobs wear, or wore, the same looking clothes every day. It was a few less decisions to make...

In life, we make thousands of decisions, but not all decisions are CRITICAL decisions. Critical decisions are life-changing decisions. They can be big or small. They can be joyful or painful, or sometimes, we don't even know a decision is critical until after the fact.

For example, I met my wife, Brenda, on a blind date. I remember going to her dorm. I knocked on the door and I didn't have any idea what to expect. Neither of us knew if this was a good decision or not. (It was for me at least. ☺)

As it turned out, each of us, agreeing to this date, showing up, it was a critical decision that changed our lives. Brenda and I are now married. We have a couple great kids, and then, a number of years ago, I quit my job. We sold our house. We moved our family, and ultimately, I answered the call to pastoral ministry.

These were critical decisions for our family...

They continue to impact the direction of our lives. They continue to impact our faith.

I share this this morning because today, seven young women and men will stand before us. They will profess their faith and they will join God's church called McCabe.

It's Confirmation Sunday. Confirmation is A MILESTONE event.

Ultimately though, it's up to each confirmand, over time, to determine if this is a critical moment in their life or not.

But we're not just talking about the confirmands this weekend. This is also about you and me. This is about the critical decisions we make. We have to decide if we're growing in faith or not.

Every day, throughout our lives, we have to decide if we're doing the things that help us grow in faith or not.

This morning's Scripture came about because of some critical decisions...

The Apostle Paul, for example, earlier in his life, had a confrontation with the Risen Christ. The Apostle Paul had to make some critical decisions. Ultimately, he decided this interaction with Christ was a life-changing experience. He decided it would Change HIS life forever.

Then, eventually, the Apostle Paul and some early Christian leaders made the critical decision to invest in young Timothy.

The stakes were high. This was about Timothy's faith and this was about the future of the fledgling Christian church.

Sounds a little like confirmation, doesn't it? Investing in young people. The future of the church at stake.

Hear some of the critical decisions in this morning's Scripture. The Apostle Paul writing to Timothy.

First, it's a warning against false teachers. Paul writes to Timothy saying:  
*There will be those who are deceptive in spirit and in teaching.  
These people are hypocrites. They claim to have faith but they're liars.  
They don't have a conscience.*

But everything God created is **good** and we don't reject **good**. We receive it with thanksgiving and God's blessing. So be intentional about the decisions you make. A good servant of Christ Jesus is nourished by the message of faith. A good servant doesn't gossip. A good servant doesn't waste time arguing over things that really don't matter.

Are you hearing the guidance on making critical decisions?

Good servants train themselves for this life and for the life that is yet to come. This is why we're willing to work hard and struggle with our faith if we have to. We have a hope that can't be defeated.

Our hope is in the living God. Our hope is in the Savior of all people.

Paul continues to Timothy saying:

*Teach these things. Don't let anyone think less of you, don't let anyone look down on you because you're young. Instead be an example. Be an example to all believers. Be an example in what you say and in the way you live. Be an example in your love and in your faith and in your purity. Focus on reading the Bible so it impacts you. Be an encourager. Be an encourager to the believers and teach them your faith.*

This is pretty relevant to this morning, isn't it? This is relevant to our confirmands and this is relevant to each and every one of us.

Paul continues,

*don't neglect the spiritual gifts you've been given. Take care of these gifts and use them.*

If you were baptized or confirmed, or, if the church leaders have ever laid hands on you, keep in mind that when they do this, the church is making a critical decision. Under the power of the Holy Spirit the church lays hands on you and then you have to decide. You decide: Will you receive the power or will you reject it? Will you or won't you receive this power and live it out?

This isn't about **playing** church...

This is about real life, wrestling with faith. This is about **BEING** the church.

Friends, those who've been baptized or confirmed, leaders have laid hands on you. They've prayed over you. Our Scripture directs us to:

*Keep that gift dusted off and in use (Message Bible translation).*

Keep that gift dusted off and in use.

Each confirmand this morning has intentionally said: Yes. I want to be confirmed. Each confirmand has said: Yes. I want to join McCabe.

And it doesn't matter if you're younger in years or younger in faith, our Scripture says:

*Don't let anyone look down upon you because you're young. Instead, let your life be a living testimony to God through Jesus Christ.*

God created you. God has a purpose for you. So Be the person God created you to be.

This morning, we're offering an altar call.

Only the confirmands and those directly supporting them will be coming to the altar rail, but the questions are for each of us, aren't they?

This morning I'm inviting you to wrestle with whether this might be a critical moment in your own life.

Critical decisions. In a moment, we'll be turning to them. You can find them on p. 34 in the red hymnal if you want to look at them now.

These questions, in a nutshell, are:

Do you reject evil?

Do you repent of your sin?

Do you accept the freedom and the power God gives you?

And, do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior? Do you promise to serve him as your Lord?

These are critical decisions...

These are decisions we can say and just go through the motions, or, these are **critical** decisions that can change our lives.

This ISN'T about playing church. This is about **Being the Church**.

Confirmands, you've spent two years overviewing the Bible and thinking about what it means to be a Christian. Today you're getting confirmed. Today you're joining the church.

Confirmands, is this a graduation? Are you done after today?

Today is a milestone, but it's not the finish line. Today is a new beginning. Today is a new beginning in what is actually a life-long process. Today you will confirm your baptismal vows and today you are BEGINNING membership in this church called McCabe...

Let's take a quick look at the membership vows (listed on the next page). They apply to our confirmands and they apply to any and all who want to faithfully live out their faith.

As people of McCabe, we've defined what our membership vows look like. We've defined what prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness look like lived out.

I invite you to take a look at the McCabe MEMBERSHIP Covenant in your bulletin (listing of CONFIRMANDS is on the other side of this sheet).

On the left side you'll see Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service, and Witness listed. And then, to their right, you'll see language describing what each of these actually look like in real life.

## McCabe Membership Covenant

- Prayers Participate regularly in a small discipleship group or other accountable discipling relationship
- Presence Participate weekly in worship at least 3 weekends each month unless prevented by illness or travel
- Gifts Commit to proportional giving to the ministries of this congregation and to moving toward a tithe
- Service Serve in some way in the local community (beyond the walls of the church) each month
- Witness Invite someone to come with me to church/events at least three times per year and build at least three relationships outside the church to witness the love of Christ

Whether someone is a member or not, there will be no difference (between member status and not a member status) in the way they are loved and cared for.

Membership is about making disciples. The role of the church is to help you do this. The church exists to serve and transform the world.

Growing and maturing in faith is a life-long process.

McCabe strives to make a difference in the community and the world. If McCabe went away, it would make a difference for so many. McCabe doesn't exist to serve us; McCabe exists to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Friends, these are critical decisions.

We make all kinds of decisions every day.

What kind of decisions are you making that help you growing in your faith?

Let's Pray:

*Dear God, we are Easter people. We are reminded that the cross isn't the end of the story. Instead, it's actually a new beginning.*

*In life, every day, we make decisions. Will we forgive and will accept forgiveness? Will we be a healing presence or will be a presence that hurts or causes harm?*

*Will we allow You to begin to heal even our deepest wounds or will we keep protective walls up around these wounds, trying to keep you out?*

*Mighty God, penetrate our lives and drive us to decision making that leads to new life and resurrection. We come before you this morning dear God wrestling with, and deciding if we can, deciding if we will, go deeper in offering you lives. We pray in the name of the Risen Jesus. Amen.*