

1st Pres San Bernardino

**“Follow the Light”**  
**Matthew 9:9-13**  
Rev. Dr. Sandra R. Tice

6/8/08 Confirmation

J. Herbert Nelson is a third-generation African American Presbyterian pastor. He is founding pastor of Liberation Community Church, an inner-city congregation in Memphis whose call it is to evangelize the poor. He is a remarkable preacher and person.

I got to know him at the CREDO conference I attended in April- he was one of the staff. He invited all of us pastors one day to think about the day of our ordination to ministry- The day that a community gathered to lay hands on us, to hear our promises to follow Jesus, and to promise their support for the work we would undertake in this new chapter of our lives.

He showed us a photo taken on the chancel steps on the day of his own ordination- a picture of him surrounded by The people who had come to stand with him and pray for him on that day- He named each of them: his mother. an Aunt. a mentor. an ‘Aunt’ who belonged to him by the Spirit (but was no relation), a preacher, someone he admired greatly, a seminary friend.

They were lined up on either side of him like a wedding party. Some of them had loved him since his childhood. Some of them had helped him to hear his call to ministry. Some of them had helped him discover and hone his gifts. And all of them stood with him on that day.

He said that their presence spoke a clear message to his heart:

**“We love you.  
Something is expected of you.  
We are behind you.”**

And this, I hope, is what we communicate to each other all the time, as members of this Christian community:

**We love you.  
Something is expected of you.  
We are behind you.**

This morning, no one is being ordained, but we are celebrating several equally important milestones.

**8 year old Brooke Hazlett**, the daughter of Peggi and sister of crucifer Michael will be baptized and marked as God’s very own. She will begin her life as a baptized child of the living God, as we say to her and to her family:

**We love you.  
Something is expected of you.  
We are behind you.**

**Seven students** who have chosen to join a confirmation class will stand before you, ready to confirm the faith into which *they* were baptized.

In some measure, they have no *idea* what they are saying ‘yes’ to- so much of life is still ahead of them, and just like a couple on a wedding day, they cannot now imagine the difficulties they will face as they follow the road they choose as they choose Jesus.

Nevertheless, they will tell you of their intention to follow the One whose call they have clearly heard. They know that you have helped them to hear it- and that if they are to continue to grow in grace and in the image of Christ, they will need your continued help. What I hope you will say to them is this:

**We love you.**

**Something is expected of you.**

**We are behind you.**

We will acknowledge our high school graduates today, and taste the bittersweet joy of their imminent launching- who can tell what they will do or who they will become? How we love them and will miss them! How we have sensed God’s love as we have watched them blossom and bless us! What is it that we want them to remember as they go?

Something, I think, like this:

**We love you.**

**Something is expected of you.**

**We are behind you.**

And as we celebrate these milestones, we remember with tenderness the transitions we have faced as a community these past few weeks. We trust that these young people, by their presence in this community, have received (whether they know it or not) the blessing & legacy of saints who have ‘graduated’ to their life in glory, and whose lives have made this a place where young people thrive.

We pray that you students, who are honored today, will inherit

The commitment & compassion of Paul Mordy,

Bill Newman’s sense of fun,

Janet Miles’ love of education and strength,

Duke Cox’s dedication to service and singing,

the leadership & enormous heart of Bill Leonard.

We hear their voices, even from beyond the grave, saying to all of us,

**We love you.**

**Something is expected of you.**

**We are behind you.**

“Follow me”, says Jesus to Matthew, and Matthew picks up and follows him.

Writer Anne Lamott says that it is hard to follow Jesus.

She points out that life is confusing, and often sad & painful. It is easy to get discouraged, or to wonder where God is or what on earth God is thinking. She points out that we don’t always get to know where we are headed, and can wander off the path.

And she says that her pastor, Veronica Goines, illustrates it this way: She says we don't get all the light we want- but God gives us enough. (*Spot comes on, on chancel floor, near the pulpit*)

We are not given the long-range plan, but we can, if we pay attention, place ourselves right at the center of the little bit of light we can see. (*Sandy steps to the center of the chancel and into the light*)

And then, if you are paying attention, you may feel a tug or an invitation- the light moves a little... (*light moves a little toward lectern*)... and you follow it.

And then when someone speaks truth to you, or something jumps out at you from scripture or a sermon- that sheds a little more light...(*light moves a little further*)...and so you follow the light.

And the idea is that you look for the love of God, you look for the things Jesus taught us, you look for the gifts of the Spirit, and you keep placing yourself right in the center of where those things show up in your life, because that is where the light of Christ is ...(*light moves to the stairs*)...and it can be trusted to lead you in the right direction.

We don't get all the light, but God gives us enough- (*down a stair*)

Enough to light our entire life journey, (*down to the sanctuary floor*)

And enough to lead us Home at the end of it.

(*Sandy turns, and heads back up the steps, light moves gradually up the aisle, then off*)

So Brooke,

Confirmands,

You who are grieving,

And you who want to keep your own promises to Christ:

**Follow the light.**

And listen for the voice of your community:

**We love you.**

**Something is expected of you.**

**We are behind you.**

Amen.