

And the answer is ...
Confirmation Sunday
May 18, 2008
Matthew 22:34-40
Rev. Susan Bresser

Do you remember the first time you ever jumped off the high dive? I grew up in small town America, where everyday in the summer was spent at the city pool. Everybody and their brother went to the pool. It was the cool place to be ... no pun attended. I hung out with a group of kids that included my older brother, my daredevil brother, Rob. Have you ever heard of Evel Knievel? He was a stunt man that lived to jump over things on his motorcycle and ride thru fire and over canyons and jump over buses... and stunts like that. He was nuts. We often called my brother Little Evel Knievel.

There was a playground at the pool. In 1976 the city put in new playground equipment. It was so sweeet. The swing set poles were painted red, white and blue. Three swings ... we called them the Racers. Kevin Schultis, Jeff Vogel and my brother, Little Evel Knievel, had “jumping out of the swing” contests. You’d swing and you’d swing and you’d swing – really high – and then you’d jump out. There were contests for jumping the farthest, contests for flips in mid-air ... Kevin Schultis could flip in mid-air and land on his feet ... no lie. There were contests to see who would break their arm first. It was sooooo sweet.

The pool didn’t open until 1 o’clock in the afternoon. I’m sure my mother sent us out of the house by 8 in the morning on those long hot summer days, so we hung out at the park until the pool opened. There were “jumping off

the monkey bar” contests, “jumping off the speeding merry go round” contests, “jumping out the mulberry tree into the sandbox” contests. It was always exciting to hang out with Rob and his friends. And ... I wanted to be just like him.

At 1pm the pool opened. And looming large where the water was 10 ft deep – looming large was the high dive. What do you think my brother did off that high dive? He and his buddies would jump and twirl and flip and somersault off that high dive. It was a sight to behold. Often the lifeguard would blow the whistle and my brother and his friends would have to sit out for the allotted 5 minute time-out period for doing something stupid on the high dive. My brother’s goal in life was to walk out on the high dive on his hands and then, you know, linger, to see how long he could keep his balance. That wasn’t allowed. And he tried it every day.

I lived in awe of that high dive and I lived in fear. The view from the bottom of the ladder was bad enough. As I stared up to the top, the ladder seemed to stretch 40,000 feet into the air. It was as if that ladder climbed right up to heaven. How cool would it be to jump off that high dive.

I loved my brother but have I told you how much I detested him? He bet me like \$20 million that I wouldn’t jump off the high dive. He and his buddies – Kevin Schultis included – stood near the high dive eggin’ me on ... making those chicken noises.

I climbed ... I climbed up the ladder of the high dive, wearing my favorite flowered swimsuit, and the climb took most of the afternoon. That ladder

went on and on and on and on. I was exhausted by the time I reached the diving board ... and there I discovered that I had totally overestimated my courage ... and that I was going to spit on my brother if I ever got off that high dive. The view from the top of the ladder was nothing short of horrifying. I'm sure I could see the roof of my house and we lived a mile away from the pool. That's how high it was. No lie. My brother, Little Evel Knievel, little creep, said, "Don't look down." What do you think I did? I looked down. Ohhhh, my goodness ...

You know there's a railing at the high dive and I was hanging on for dear life. My knuckles had turned white. I didn't hear the lifeguard whistle, not the first time, not the second time, not the third time ... the lifeguard was blowing her whistle at me, trying to move me along because there was a long line of kids that really wanted to go off the high dive ... and had the courage to do so.

I did what any sane child would do. I climbed back down the ladder. When my feet touched solid ground, that little creep Rob came up to me and said, "Don't tell Mom I made you climb that ladder ... and you owe me \$20 million dollars."

It took me an entire summer to get up the courage to jump off that high dive. All summer I would watch kids and adults climb that ladder and jump or dive into the water. I watched as they surfaced – arms and legs intact – and swim to the side, only to get out of the pool and repeat the process over and over again. I watched that all summer long.

At the end of summer, I did it. I climbed what seemed like 450 steps to the top of the high dive. I walked to the end of the diving board – it was walking the plank – and I did not look down. Out of the corner of this eye I saw the lifeguard, sitting calm and content in her chair, swinging her whistle. I was wondering why she hadn't alerted the entire lifeguard staff as well as the coast guard and the volunteer fire department, because I was fairly certain that the end of my life was near. Out of the corner of this eye, I saw my brother ... that little creep. He was calling out to me. What was he saying? "You can do it, you can do it, you can do it." Well, that little creep. He was cheering me on and soon all his buddies joined in the chant.

I jumped. I jumped off the high dive. My heart was beating out of my chest. My stomach, I think, remained at the top of the diving board. It took like 10 years for me to hit the water. Then, whoosh, I was under. And I went all the way to the bottom of the 10 foot section of the pool, touching the bottom of the pool. That set in just a little moment of panic, but I kicked my feet and surfaced and wiggled my body parts—everything seemed to be attached, made sure my swimsuit was intact, and swam to the side of the pool, where my creepy, loving, all-time favorite brother pulled me out of the water and said, "I knew you could do it."

Today you're taking the plunge. You're on the edge of the high dive, the end of the diving board. Put a little kick in your step and jump. Today you're taking the plunge into discipleship. In the United Methodist Church, you are jumping into official membership. You've been eyein' up that high dive for 7 mos now. It's loomed large in your view and today you're gonna jump.

You need to trust in order to jump. You've all told me that you're ready to trust. You've already learned to trust the lifeguards – your mentors – who have provided you with some awesome life-saving techniques. When I was growing up, the lifeguards at the city pool also taught swimming lessons. Your mentors have been great instructors, leading you into the deeper waters and then cheering you on as you climb the ladder of the high dive. Now you just have to trust that God will provide the water ... you know what, God provides the water.

It's not always a soft landing. You'll belly-flop once or twice or more, your swimsuit might get a little askew, you'll probably get water up your nose, you might have your mouth open a bit too much and you'll choke on the water you swallow, and you when you get out of the water, you might slip on the wet surfaces, but God will never, ever leave you. When you take the plunge, you never ever swim alone. We dive into discipleship because we trust God.

For 13, 14, 15 years, you've been watching others take the plunge. You've watched and witnessed as they stepped out of the water and they were whole. The emphasis on WHOLE (W-H-O-L-E). I know some of you have said, "I wanna do that. I wanna do that. I wanna be whole like that."

I want to be the one standing on the edge; the one you see out of the corner of your eye, saying, "You can do it. You can do it. You can do it." I want to gather others around me, saying "you can do it!"

I don't know a lot of things, but there are a few things I'm pretty sure about. Here's what I know: You're an amazing class of high school freshmen. You are bright, you are kind, you are respectful, you are faithful, several of you are downright flippin comedians, you believe strongly in the bonds of community, you love to laugh, you love to learn, and for past 7 mos you were willing to open your eyes and your mind to the confirmation experience.

I know that in my life, the only way I get through it is with God. There are times when I have nothing else to hang on to other than my relationship with God and the relationships I have with God's faithful people. That's it. That's the answer. God will never leave you and you are never alone. That's the final answer.

Today 19 confirmands have decided to take the plunge. They have been involved in some intense moments of learning, some intense moments of insanity, some intense moments of eating, some intense moments of hilarity, some intense moments of prayer, some intense moments of being the hands and feet of Christ, and some intense moments of grace. And I am so proud of them.

Let's get the ladder ready, shall we? The lifeguards are in position. The water's just right. Just jump. I know you can do it.