

Roots and Wings

Grad Sunday, Pastor Mary Koon

June 2, 2019

Today we recognize our graduates. It is a time of endings and beginnings. If you are fortunate enough, one's life will have many passages such as these. I'm not talking about attaining degree after degree, but rather, times when we graduate from one way of life into another. Some of those times involve ritual and celebration, like a wedding, the birth or adoption of a child, or a funeral. Some pass without public fanfare, like when you start a new job, or move residences, or awaken to a new understanding of the world.

Our scripture this morning comes from the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul recognizes the broken nature of our lives and our world. We don't need to look very hard to discover this for ourselves these days. Perhaps, more than ever, it's in our faces because of the shrinking of the world through the internet and social media. Paul is filled with hope. Through his writing, he emphasizes that Christ is tirelessly knitting together all that is broken, all that's estranged, all that is despairing. Christ is always alive and at work. It was Paul's greatest joy to discover that Christ was alive in him, and he wants people to know that Christ is alive in us, too, allowing us to live into our full humanity. The section of Ephesians we'll read today is a prayer and a benediction.

Listen to God is speaking to you through these ancient words this morning.

I pray that, according to the riches of God's glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through the Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. AMEN

Adults spend a lot of time asking young people what they want to do when they grow up. It's a legitimate question – we genuinely are interested. (One I'm sure you're tired of hearing by now.) But perhaps a more relevant question is what kind

of person do you want to be now and in the future, and how do you intend to live in the world?

To get at this question about *how* we are to live, I searched long and hard for just the right scripture that would embody all the blessing, the wisdom, and all the instruction I want to share with you this morning. I considered the prophet Jeremiah talking about God's plan for your life, a life of promise and hope. I thought about Jesus teaching us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." Or possibly Micah, "Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God." Each worth a whole sermon or ten. Then I thought of stories that convey meaning and purpose -- Abraham and Sarah, who leave their home and journey trusting God, or the fishermen James and John who leave their net and follow Jesus. Apostle Paul who is transformed from persecutor to evangelist. And then, there's the story of Jesus' life.

The truth is that there simply isn't one good story or verse in the Bible that we can easily select that gives you all the juicy details of what it means to live a life of meaning and purpose. Scripture is meant to be digested in its multi-vocal totality, with Jesus, the shining star, who shows us what it means to be fully human. Jesus' teachings can be summed up in his commandment to love one another. And that takes a lifetime of discovery.

I believe that a holistic life of faith is grounded in scripture, nurtured in prayer, sustained in community and fed by meaningful work and service to others. God's wisdom is sung throughout the cosmos, it's shouted on the street corners, it's found in refugee camps and art museums. God stops at nothing to woo us, to speak God's truth of love, justice and grace to any who stop long enough to listen.

There is lots of life experience in this room, including young folks. We will be going to the community to receive their insights about what they might say to their 18-year-old selves, and I hope we'll hear what adults need to know from youth as well.

So, as you graduate, I offer you a few nuggets that I think help with that question of how to be in the world from one of our very first teachers, Dr. Seuss.

1. "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

Discover your passion and dig into it.

We are all given different passions and abilities. Regardless of age, we can experience and learn new things. Widen the areas of your comfort zones and discover your bliss. Then follow it, feed it. Jesus continually expanded the boundaries of his disciples comfort zones.

The world needs people who are zealous about public policy, animal rehabilitation and care, art that expands the mind, computers that might aid people who are paralyzed. Frederick Beuchner says that true joy is found where your deep gladness meets the world's great need.

2. "Today you are you, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is youer than you."

Believe in yourself, God does.

Paul reminds us in his prayer that you are loved beyond measure by the one who created the universe. God's power is at work inside of you whether you know it or not. Belovedness is in your DNA – don't waste time comparing yourselves to others. The thought to ponder today by Emerson, who writes, "What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us." It is the Spirit that strengthens your inner being.

A little girl was at a fair with her dad and ordered some cotton candy. She received a gigantic mound of pink, fluffy floss on a stick. Her father said, "Honey, how are you ever going eat that gigantic thing?" She looked at him and said, "Dad, I am bigger on the inside than I am on the outside."

The tools to make it in life are already within you, and if you find you are lacking one, know that others around you that will share resources.

3. "If you keep your eyes open enough, oh, the stuff you will learn. Oh, the most wonderful stuff." From The Places You'll Go.

This earth is holy ground and you are standing upon it.

Paying attention is a spiritual practice. Opening your eyes and ears to what's happening around you transforms dinner with new friends in the cafeteria into communion. Getting caught in the rain, feeling the water as it splashes on your head serves as a reminder of baptism. God is around every corner, beneath your feet, and in everyone you meet. The challenge is to be receptive to God's promptings and learn from them.

4. "Think and wonder, wonder and think."

Slow down, even for a short while, to enjoy long thoughts.

How is it even possible to comprehend the depth, breadth and height of the love from an immeasurable God? Faith begins in awe. I do not want to live a life that doesn't stop and wonder at a pink/orange sunset, or marvel at the taste of cold watermelon on a hot day, or admire the beauty of the prose in a great book. Wondering and thinking take time. So stop in your studies, and your work and take a breath.

Now, let's see what our congregation says...(multiple responses from congregation).

Thanks be to God for the lives and wisdom from the saints in this place, those who came before us, and those who will follow. AMEN