

## *Our Passionate Life*

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, Rev. Mary Koon  
Romans 12:1-13; June 21, 2020

Graduation is a time of endings and beginnings. A time to celebrate what was and look forward to what will be. As we celebrate with you, it offers us a moment to remember our life passages and reestablish goals for the future. As I address our graduates today, of course, I speak to all of us, including myself.

It is a remarkable time for our young adults to be graduating high school and college. Jack, Katherine and Kaitlyn you were born in the shadow of 9/11 when Ella, Catherine and Margaret were barely out of diapers. And now, almost 19 years later, you graduate during a pandemic and a renaissance of the civil rights movement. You graduate at a time when culture and society is changing quickly, thanks be to God, with young and old speaking out and demanding change in light of the injustice and inequities that have been tolerated for too long.

This time really feels different, doesn't it? More highly charged, we are at a precipice to change. To use biblical language, we can understand this as *kairos* time, or "a favorable moment for decision or action," as opposed to *chronos*, the regular, chronological, and sequential passing of time. Another definition of *kairos* calls it a time "when things come to a head." (*Sojourners*, 6/18)

The question for graduates, for us all, is how then shall we live? What is God calling us to do in this moment...what is the next faithful step? What would Jesus want us to do?

This is the lens through which we will read our text today – it comes from the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome, written about 58 AD.

Paul did not have personal contacts at the church in Rome, but had a goal to travel to Spain, and he wrote to the church so that when he arrived, he might find a welcome there.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul offers the essence of his theology – his essential beliefs as a Christ follower. The verses we'll read addresses ethical questions

about how to live - his words are a graduation sermon in and of themselves – they come from the heart, out of an abundance of faith love for the Christ.

Listen to how God may be speaking to you this morning. I'll be reading selected verses from *The Message*, Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Bible.

Romans 12:1-13, selected verses *The Message* (MSG)

<sup>1-2</sup> So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God. Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what The Holy One wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

<sup>3</sup> I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what God does for us, not by what we are and what we do for God.

<sup>4-6</sup> In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of Christ's body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.

<sup>9-10</sup> Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

<sup>11-13</sup> Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

### *Prayer*

One day Farmer Henry's pig was talking to his chicken. "What can we do for Farmer Henry to show our appreciation for all he has done for us?" the pig asked.

"I don't know," replied the chicken. "What do you think? They thought for a moment, and then the chicken spoke up: "We could serve him a huge thank-you breakfast with scrambled eggs and bacon!"

The pig thought for a moment and then said, "Oh, sure, that's easy for you to say. For you it's a small sacrifice, but for me it's total commitment."

### **Graduates – go all in.**

Paul says that our faith-filled and passionate life begins by embracing all that God has done for us, and responding in gratitude with our whole beings. Let every part of your life come alive with worship. This is a re-imagining of the worship in the ancient world -- tied to a priest and a burnt offering. And it's a good reminder that worship may begin on Sunday morning, but is only part of the equation. Let everything you do – from most grand to most mundane -- be to God's glory.

### **Graduates – keep on learning – we're all, always growing up!**

Grounding our lives in God focuses us on what really matters. It produces courage to discern the truth of the culture in which we live and to ask questions and work for change. And today's culture can be toxic.

Rev. Dr. Diane Givens Moffet, leader Presbyterian Mission Agency writes in a prayer that ... "We are living with a pandemic that is killing people all over the planet -- a pandemic that adversely and disproportionately affects black people and other people of color. We are living with a culture of bias, bigotry, and hatred that creates an environment where white supremacists murder black men and women in broad daylight and go home free of any charges or arrest.

We are living in a society that kicks people, blames them for limping, then expects them to be patient, peaceable, and passive.

We are living in a time when injustice reigns and lies are presented as truths.”  
(<https://ga-pcusa.org/180-days-of-prayer/>)

Don't be dragged down by hateful rhetoric and lies, but commit to be vigilant encouragers of truth. Be doers of justice, knowing that justice is at the heart of God.

### **Graduates – lean into community.**

The church is called to lead at this pivotal moment. We adults commit to do the hard work of self-examination to face truth about our personal and collective role in the world's suffering and then to act.

True meaning and purpose are found in knowing that we are a vital part of a whole. It's not all about you. Paul describes the church as a body, organic and intricate, each of us called to find our passion and live into that work. The challenging work of authentic discipleship has always been counter cultural.

Author Brian McLaren writes, “Before Christianity was a rich and powerful religion, before it was associated with buildings, budgets, crusades, colonialism or televangelism, it began as a revolutionary nonviolent movement promoting a new kind of aliveness on the margins of society. It exposed a system based on domination, privilege and violence and proclaimed in its place a vision of mutual service, mutual responsibility and peaceable neighborliness.” (We Make the Road by Walking, introduction)

Being alive in 2020 and a Presbyterian is an exciting place to be. Historically, the PCUSA has worked for social and political transformation and continues to have an office in Washington. Last night, in a historic vote, Gregory Bently and Elona Street-Stewart became African American and Indigenous person co-moderators of the 224<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. The denomination is committed to anti-racism, church vitality and social justice, as are we. Oak Grove continues to build on our rich history of service and mission, and I can feel the vibrations of seismic change all around me. It is scary and exhilarating. We need you -- you will always have a place here – where we keep one another fueled and aflame for the things we are called to do.

## **Graduates – Love authentically.**

Love listens. It lifts up. It risks. It renews. It speaks truth to power and admits mistakes. Love forgives. Let it move you and guide you.

Cornel West says that justice is what love looks like in public. (Cornel West, (<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/279991-never-forget-that-justice-is-what-love-looks-like-in>))

I will close with words to live by, words of love, offered by our weekly Forward with Grief group. We all have years of experience and wisdom grown from tender loss and remarkable courage.

I invite anyone who wishes to add on Facebook, your own offering of love to our grads.

Here are some words to live by from the group:

- Listen with your heart
- “Take your time, but also take advantage of your youth to do the things you want to do - you might not have the opportunity when you get older”
- “Listen more. Talk Less”
- “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in service to others”
- Just Keep Going”

Graduates of 2020 – we love you and are proud of who you are. May God’s blessings be upon you and know that we hold you in our hearts as prayers as you step boldly into the next chapter of your lives.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN