

Sermon 052018 Pentecost

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

Gen 11:1-9

Sermon Title-Backward and Forward

This is a fun day here at Union Church. We take time to celebrate our graduates, both the young and not so young. One of the things to recognize is what this means for each of our graduates in the arch of their lives. To graduate is to finish. That is, you complete all of the assignments and to do those things well enough to get passing grades. Some of these people have far exceeded passing grades. We have excellence in our midst, folks.

Our graduates can look back with pride at having accomplished something difficult with true achievement. This is a good time for our graduates to look back with a sense of pride. Take pride in being someone who finishes. In the Scouting movement, there are many, many boys who make Life Scout but never get over the hump to make Eagle. You would be amazed at how many people fall three credits short of graduating from college.

This often sets people up for unfinished household projects, unfinished reports in work, unfinished repair of relationships. I know that our not so young graduates both struggled mightily to finish the thesis. And they finished. Each and every one of our graduates, take time to reflect on your accomplishments. Graduation time is the time to look backward.

It is also time to look forward. This is the time of year that you hear a particular word... commencement. Graduation means the end of something. Commencement means the beginning of something. There is a somewhat rude question that graduates get. The question is, "What are you going to do after graduation?" I remember being asked that question when I was graduating from BU School of Theology. My answer to the question was, "Have dinner."

The truth is, we don't know what the future holds. Some of our graduates are college bound, which is great. All of your achievement and hard work in high school has earned you the right to work even harder in college. But the reality is, college isn't for everyone. So, even though your future seems set, you don't know what it holds.

I'll let you in on a secret. Most college students will change their major at least once, some more than once. As you commence into the next phase of your life, be prepared for life's uncertainties. I'm a good example. I was 51 years old when I decided what I want to be when I grow up. I dropped out of my business career, went to seminary and here I am.

I guess what I'm saying is, what appears as a fairly certain future, is not certain at all. What might look like a clear road map, isn't. As you face life's uncertainties, I ask you to do these three things. 1. Believe in yourself. You already have accomplishments to your name. Know that you will add more. 2. Believe in your family, even when

they drive you crazy. You know that going to college is going to change your life. Think about how it will change your family's lives. All the meals prepared, all the hugs, all the caring for you when you were sick is going away. It's the only family you have and you've got responsibilities to nurture the love and togetherness of your family. 3. Keep the faith. You have learned the lessons of Jesus here. Live them. Remember that love is better than hate, forgiveness is better than resentment, kindness is better than coldness, and caring is better than indifference. Hold onto those things as you enter your uncharted future.

Seeing what isn't there, traveling without a map is what makes life interesting. That is what imagination is all about. It is the use of imagination that sets the spirit free. A plan is what in business is called 'thinking inside the box.' Imagination is about thinking 'outside the box.' It is the use of the imagination that allows the Holy Spirit-which we celebrate today-to be set free in each and every one of us.

So let's turn to Pentecost, the disciple's graduation ceremony. They were in an upper room in Jerusalem. They were blown away by what had happened to Jesus, both his death and resurrection. They had, being the responsible planners that they were, just elected a replacement for Judas, Matthias, as the twelfth Apostle. So, they were remembering; looking back. They were also making plans.

Suddenly, things got wild in a hurry. They heard a sound like the blowing of a violent wind inside. What seemed like tongues of fire

rested upon them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues. It was an incredible, thrilling and wondrous scene. I'll guess that the carefully laid plans that the disciples were making did not include this happening. This wasn't on any of their maps. The disciples were changed forever. They were set on fire by the Holy Spirit. Power and imagination replaced the careful plans that were left way behind. The church was born of the Holy Spirit. The feast of the Pentecost celebrates the birth of the church. Where fear and trembling had been, courage and boldness reigned.

Now, here's a fact that you might find it hard to hear. Jesus Christ and then the Holy Spirit at Pentecost did not change a thing in the world of the Apostles. Think of that; nothing had changed. The Roman Empire still ruled. The Jews and the Greeks were still difficult. Life was still nasty, brutish and short. Death was still certain and often painful. None of these things were changed or altered. What Christ and the Spirit changed were the Apostles. The disciples of Christ were suddenly empowered, enabled. They became changed people in an unchanged world.

Here is my definition of a Christian. Now don't hold me to just one definition of a Christian. I may have more definitions that I haven't thought of yet. But is my working definition of a Christian. To be a Christian is to be a changed person in an unchanged world. Anyone can be a Christian in a Christian world, but this is not, my

friends, a Christian world. This is a pagan world, a fallen world, a secular world, a sordid world, a shabby world, and it happens to be the only world we've got. In fact, this world bears a striking resemblance in these ways to the world of the first Pentecost. To be a Christian is to be changed in the middle of that which is unchanged.

It is, sadly, unlikely that this year's current crop of graduates, whether high school, college, or higher degrees, will change much in this tired old world. What they can do is what the disciples did. It is what you and I can do. What we can do is become the changes God can make in each of us. In our own way, in our own little part of the world, we can be the change we want in the world. We have the power of God. It is the greatest power on earth. The power of God carries in it the courage and boldness to stand up to the selfishness and deceit in the world. It is the power of the Holy Spirit. It is Pentecostal power. It is the power that overcomes language barriers, racial barriers, and economic divides and cultural divides. It is the power of love in the name of Jesus Christ.

The power of the Holy Spirit that was bestowed upon the original disciples on that first Pentecost is upon us. It came upon us in Baptism and it is in us when we love in the name of Jesus Christ. We can be the change that we wish for the world. We may not be able to change the world, but we, with God's help, can sure change who we are and how

we respond to the world. The Holy Spirit makes all things possible in us through Christ. AMEN