

“A Little More To Say”

John 16:12-15,33

June 6, 2010

There I was, working on a sermon to give advice to the graduates of 2010 when I suddenly realized that we didn't have all that many graduates, and a whole lot of people who weren't graduating. How many of you are not graduating this year? And yet, when people remain in the school of hard knocks, and I figure that many of us are enrolled there, that maybe there are some things that all of us need to know. And since I am the only one preaching here today, I thought I might have a little more to say about what we all need to know as we go out into the world.

First of all, I hope we all know that the world can be and often is a pretty messed up place. My generation knew that and so we were determined to go out and change the world, to recreate it in our own image. And to some extent we did, which is partly why the world is still messed up, maybe even more so because we already “fixed it.” But we were a little slow to recognize that we weren't as good as we always thought we were. Though we tried to convince ourselves that we were perfect, we were not. And so the world we created was not the utopia that we had planned. And as you go out into the world, remember that you're not perfect either. Some of us think that we know exactly how the world should be run. But we don't have the power or authority to make things happen as we want them to happen. After all, God gave everyone free will, not just you or me. We may think that we are or should be the center of the universe, but the universe is not going to see it that way, for ever since the creation, all of humanity has been trying to correct the world that God created and declared very good, and the result has been problematic.

Case in point, consider that right now, students are preparing for graduation, that is the completion of their course of study. But schools are preparing for commencement, which is a beginning. Does that make any sense? No wonder we have problems communicating. I mean, shouldn't the students be getting ready for a new beginning while the schools prepare for the end of their association with a particular class. Now the schools ought to know better, even though the language is pretty traditional, and I believe that the schools are trying to emphasize to the students that this is a new beginning rather than the culmination of learning. It seems that too few students are aware of the maxim that I heard from the late legendary basketball coach John Wooden: “It's what you learn after you know it all that is important.” So the students still long for graduation, the end. They go off to the beach to celebrate meeting a major goal in life. I guess that's important. But isn't that like beginning a job and asking if you can start with a two week vacation. That doesn't work. So to help all our students who are learning their way through life, here's a couple things to remember that just might help along the way.

1. The Reality Is Not as Bad as the Perception. As a nation we are focused on appearances, on perceptions, but as an adult, try to separate the reality from the image. Think about how the press portrays the news. Recently it seems that some Toyotas would speed up for no apparent reason and then refuse to stop. Now I drive a Toyota and at times it goes very fast, but that's not Toyota's fault, unless I happened to be stopped by the police. There have been 6200 such reports to Toyota since 2000. Now that sounds like a lot, and to here the press talk about it, every Toyota is about ready to explode with speed. But since 2000, over 20 million Toyotas have been sold. So 6200 is less than 0.03%, and when you consider other Toyotas on the road prior to 2000, that percentage drops big time. 6200 is not the norm but an aberration. The reality is not nearly as bad as the perception.

Now that’s important to know, particularly for our younger folks, because they have a tremendous challenge on their hands. This generation has been raised in a time when expressions of faith have decreased and violent force has increased. This is a generation that has been taught through the actions of the world that life is not all that valuable. They are shown that through video games and various forms of entertainment. They have been shown that through abortion and euthanasia. It is an attitude that if life becomes inconvenient or uncomfortable, get rid of it. This is a generation that has been told that they will have to clean up the environment that we wasted. They will have to pay for our debts of Social Security, Medicare, and other accumulated government debt, including the costs of war and freedom.

So what do we have here? A violent world where life is not important, where we have to work for decades to repay the debts of our parents and grandparents. And, of course, once all those bills are finally paid, will there be anything left? Add to that the stress of ever increasing technology that has the tendency to speed up a world that is already going too fast and we have a recipe for disaster. We have generations that has been raised without hope, without faith, without a future. And all that has led to anger, hatred, and despair that occasionally is played out with gangs and drugs and guns. It is played out in the streets of our cities where many teens have no qualms about killing or even being killed because life just isn’t worth living. It is no wonder that graduates want to run away for Senior week, for this chance to escape before they have to take on the responsibilities of adult life.

Now we can spend a lot of time arguing about the influences and attitudes that have led us to this point in time, but that’s not productive. The real question is, now that we are here, what are we going to do about it? To answer that question, we need to remember that the reality is not as bad as the perception. I know that because the Lord who created this world is still in control. In Him there is hope, and He has given us the scriptures to help us hold on to that hope. God is real, and our reality in God is far better than what the world shows us. So our reality is much better than our perception.

2. We Are Not Alone in Our Struggles. Genesis 28:15a The Lord said to Jacob, *“I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.”* Or the words of Jesus from Matthew 28:20, *“I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.”* And again in John 14:18, *“I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.”* It is a consistent message that there is nothing that we have to deal with all by ourselves. Jesus said that He would send a Guide, a Counselor, the Spirit of truth to help lead us through the trials and tribulations of life. By looking to God’s Spirit we can tap into the wisdom of the ages, for God is wisdom. Some think that they have to go on a pilgrimage for wisdom. They seek wisdom in all sorts of ways, all sorts of places. But wisdom is available to us even now if we will only open our hearts and spirits to the teachings of Jesus.

Many of us have been told to pray when we have an important decision to make, and yet almost as many wonder how prayer is really going to help. It is not like we can get a text from God. So let us remember that **3. To Hear from God We Have to Listen with Our Spirit.** Jesus said, *“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”* (John 4:24) We have to listen with our hearts. When we have a choice to make, when we have to decide on what to do, which way to turn, first look at all the possibilities. Look at all the choices. Then in prayer, ask the Lord to increase your desire for one, while all the others decrease. “Magnify Your way, O Lord.” Pray that prayer consistently. Pray that prayer often and soon the choice will be clear. It will come from the wisdom of God.

Of course, don’t wait until you have to make the decision to begin to pray. Luke 18:1 *“Then Jesus told his disciples ... that they should always pray and not give up.”* That says that **4. We Are to Have of an Attitude**

of Prayer. What does that mean, to have an attitude of prayer? That means that in all times, in all situations we should think and act as though we are communicating with God, because in truth, we are. But be a little more intentional about it. These days people will talk about someone with “an attitude” in a hard, angry, negative sense. That is the way of the world. But if we begin and end our day by looking to the Lord, if we regularly go through our day engaged in an ongoing conversation with God, with Jesus, we will discover a different attitude, with a much different result. Then we can be hopeful rather than hateful, with peace overpowering our problems.

Some might ask, “What right do we have to talk to God? God is powerful and perfect, while we are weak and sinful.” True. But we are justified through faith. Romans 5:1: *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* We are justified, that is, God treats us just as if we had never sinned. Because Christ took our penalty by dying on the cross, we can know the peace of standing in the presence of God, without fear, without worry. And not only have we been justified, We are also accepted by God. Romans 15:7 *“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”* And since we are justified and accepted by God, we can speak with God any time of any day. And if we are in an ongoing conversation with God, we are open to hearing from God at any moment. As long as we maintain that attitude of prayer, we can come close to God and discover that we can have peace in our lives. No matter what the world throws at us, we can be at peace because we can live in Christ. That doesn’t mean that we won’t have any stress or trouble. But it does mean that when trouble comes, and it will come, we will be able to deal with it. Always give thanks for the grace that allows our hearts to be at peace even in the midst of a world of trouble. It doesn’t matter what we are facing, even death itself. If we can be at peace when we stand in the presence of God, we can be at peace anywhere for the Lord will be with us everywhere.

But the world doesn’t know that. The world doesn’t trust giving their heart and life over to this Being that science can’t see. And the result of that reluctance has been an increase in hatred, fear, and anger. People are more interested in revenge than repentance; in maintaining grudges rather than offering forgiveness. They put their trust in greed rather than grace; in money more than mercy. Even in a world created out of God’s love, they can find no hope. Fear fills the void. And fear prevents us from coming together in fellowship. Fear keeps us isolated and alone, ready to strike out at anything that might harm us; ready to become violent at the least provocation. And in fear, all the world looks out at what we have become. All the world wonders how we can possibly make it through another day. And it’s scary. And it’s sad. But it is not the way our life has to be!

In a land of darkness God said, “Let there be light!” and it was so. In a land of fear God said, “Let there be hope!” and it was so. In a land filled with distrust and anger God said, “Let love set these people free!” and it was so. And it can be so, for you and for me. It can all be yours: the hope; the wisdom; the love; the peace; it can all be ours, not by following the way of the world. Not by trying to exult ourselves or getting even. Hard shell crabs imprison themselves in a bushel basket because they are constantly pulling one another down. They are so focused on themselves that they can’t see the others who are struggling in the same situation. They keep pulling one another down so that all remain imprisoned. None can be free. And people do the same thing. But God, the Spirit of Truth can lift us higher than we can ever imagine. God’s Spirit will find ways to lead us on a path where hope and peace can abound.

But the choice is always ours. We can look at life, we can look at each week as though it is a graduation, where we just want to get through it, so we can put it behind us and get away to relax. Or we can look at each week as though it is a commencement, a new beginning, with all the hope, love, and peace that was present when the earth was first created. The world will lead you one way, but the Lord will go another. Day by day,

“A Little More To Say” John 16:12-15,33 June 6, 2010

week by week, what is the direction you will go? To graduation, the end, just trying to get it over and done with? Or will you go to commencement, with all the hope, joy, and excitement of a new beginning? One way leads to a meaningless, monotonous, mundane existence. The other takes us to the joy of new life. But the choice is yours. May you look to the wisdom that comes with the Spirit of truth. May you walk in the way of the Lord now and forever. Amen.