

Sermon

The Rev. Noah Van Niel

5/28/17

St. John the Evangelist

Easter VII (Sunday after Ascension): Acts 1:6-14; Psalm 68: 3-10; 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17: 1-11

Tis graduation season, my friends. All those colleges last week, High Schools this week, heck I even drove by Wilder School a few days ago and there were about a hundred cars parked out front for what I guess must have been *pre-school* graduation. And with all these graduations, you know what that means: commencement speeches! Who spoke where? What words of wisdom did they offer?

Today is also the final Sunday of Eastertide; the great fifty days of celebration after Easter are drawing to a close. And it's the first Sunday after the Ascension, which was celebrated on Thursday. That's why we hear about that episode in our first reading from the book of Acts this morning. The Resurrected Jesus has been appearing to and among his disciples for weeks now, and it is time for him to finally head to Heaven, to take his place at the right hand of God. But not before he promises to send an Advocate who will guide the disciples in his absence, which is what we celebrate next week, at the jubilant feast of Pentecost, with the arrival of the Holy Spirit, and the birthday of the Church. With these two things, graduation season and Ascenciontide happening together, it got me thinking: today is kind of like the Disciples' graduation—it marks the end of Jesus' hand holding as they are sent forth into the world.

So I wonder, if Jesus were giving a commencement speech...what would he say?? Here goes:

*Greetings class of 33 AD!! We made it!! I want to give thanks to my mom and dad and dad for all their love and support through the years. I wouldn't be here without them. And I want to thank each of you, my disciples, for being with me through these last four years. It's a miracle that I'm standing here before you, given everything we've been through, crucifixion and all. It's a great honor to be able to address you one last time. I love you guys.*

*Class of 33 the past four years have been something else, like something the world has never seen—truly righteous. We had some amazing times and some hard times. We've grown together, bonded, blessed by all those experiences, good and bad. You guys remember that time we fed all those people with just a few leftovers some kid had? That was awesome. Or when we went to Jerusalem and I totally flipped out over those money-changers in the Temple? That was intense. And things were looking pretty grim towards the end there, but thanks be to God, we came out alright.*

*Anyways, I don't have time to recount all the amazing things we've done, but I know you remember them. So let me be serious for a minute, I really just have one message for you today: share it. Share what you saw and heard. Be my witnesses. Go out into the city streets and into the countryside and across the ocean and tell people that you know God because you knew me. Proclaim that good news to all nations. Tell them everything that happened between us. The world needs to know, and I need to know you will talk about this. Promise me that. Promise me I won't be forgotten because you were too shy or too scared and you just kept all this good news to yourself. Promise me that the proclamation of peace and justice, forgiveness and love won't end with you. Look, it's up to you now. You know what I'm about, you know what I've been teaching you, you*

*have seen me come back from the dead, so you know how powerful and amazing God is. Tell people. Share that good news.*

*I know, I know some of you don't like talking about personal things like faith or why you believe God is real. But friends, what you know could change someone's life. It could bring them hope when they're in despair, bring them comfort when they're grieving, strength when they are afraid, it can bring joy and purpose to their life. You've experienced that. I know you have. So why would you withhold that life-changing possibility from someone else? The point is not just to nourish your own soul but to share that nourishment with everyone. I'm not asking you to compel and coerce, I'm asking you to share and invite. Otherwise all this, even this glorious Resurrection—the triumph of life over death that we have been celebrating these last few weeks will go nowhere. You have been given a great gift, the gift of the knowledge of God through me. Give this gift to others. Go out there and do it. Look, they may not take it from you, but you have to offer it. That's all I ask of you.*

*Friends, I would like to close with prayer. You know me, always praying. And because I know no better way to tell you how much I love you and want you to succeed in this good work: So let us pray, "Father, I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me...And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. Amen. "*

*Alright, Class of 33, that's all I got. Be good to one another. Keep the faith. And remember it's not goodbye—it's I'll see you later. Go Saints!*

Well, he may not have said exactly that. But I do think Jesus would want us to know that we are the ones responsible for sharing the good news of God in Jesus Christ. We have inherited that great commission. When we leave this place, the world needs to hear from us about what it is we found here. When we are dismissed at the end of the service, we should be propelled out into the world to spread the love of God that others may be transformed so that the world may be transformed.

I know talking about your faith and inviting other people into it isn't easy for most of us; I'm sensitive to that. But it is also the one thing Jesus wanted to make sure his disciples did before he left them. Not all of you have to go straight to the street corner. Start by telling someone that in this age of anxiety, you have found a place of peace; a community where you also have a lot of fun and you feel welcomed and loved and supported. And then, if things are going well, throw in the fact that the reason that you are a part of that community is because you believe in God. And if you're feeling bold, you might add (*gulp*) that you also believe in Jesus and all he stood for. And then, if they still haven't left, you can work up to saying you believe God is still active and present and real in the world through the work of the Holy Spirit. And then my friends you will have become an evangelist; a herald of the good news. You might not feel like you're prepared enough for such conversations, but you are. You know what God has done for you. And if ever you feel like you're getting out of your depth, send the person on to me, I'd love to talk to them. And when I feel like I'm getting out of my depth, I'll send them on to Fr. Tim. We're all in this together. We are the ones Jesus needs to spread his message. We are the ones the world needs and is waiting for. We are those with the good news of healing and hope, for all to hear. We have been given our charge. We have been given strength for the journey. So when we go forth from this place, let us go forth in *the name of Christ*. Thanks be to God.