

Sermon for Sunday, May 26

“Graduation Sermon: Intentional Faith”

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 26, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Pastor Judd Larson, Preacher and Presider

John 14:23-29

²³ Jesus answered him, “Those who love me **will keep my word**, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵ **“I have said these things to you while I am still with you.** ²⁶ But the Advocate,^[a] the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and **remind you** of all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ **And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.**

Grace and Peace to you from our Savior, Jesus. Alleluia! Christ is risen! (Response: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!)

I bring you greetings from my spouse, Pastor April Ulring Larson, who is preaching at Zion UCC in Waukon this morning, and from Pastor Amy Zalk Larson who I can testify cares deeply for you all.

How great is it that Jesus rose from the dead, and that Millie Dinger will be raised from the dead, and that you--your body--will be raised from the dead on the Day of Our Lord Jesus! That's worth another Alleluia!

Congratulations Hallie, Anthony, and Natalie (unable to be present) as you graduate. What question have you heard the most these last few days? *What are your plans after you graduate?* Don't you just hate that question? And you need such a specific answer, like, “I'm going to Luther College, become a music major, and then be a high school choir director like Mr Rausch.”

Our Gospel reading for this sixth Sunday of Easter is a small part of an extended reading called The Great Discourse. In this discourse, Jesus is explaining to his followers that he will

be going away, that they cannot follow, that the Advocate (the Comforter, the Paraclete, The Holy Spirit) will be sent, and that he will come again. Jesus also says he is preparing them ahead of time, "before it occurs," so that they may believe.

Jesus also says, "Those who love me will keep my word ..." This theme reverberates through these chapters of John: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (vs 15); and, "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me ..." (vs 21); "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love ..." (15:10); All go back to 13:34, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." In the Gospel of John, 'commandment', 'word', 'words' are interchangeable synonyms that go back to the very first verse of the Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

This Word Jesus leaves his followers, along with the Paraclete who will remind them of Jesus' words and help them remember Jesus' words after he has departed.

As I was reading this Gospel text, it occurred to me that all of this is about God's plan for you and for me as followers of Jesus. You know, "What's your plan for after graduation?" Only this is, "What's the plan for after Jesus' departure?"

Have you ever heard someone say, "God has a plan for you?" or, "It's God's will that this happened?" It's as though God has plotted every detail of your life ahead of time. With the corollary that you better figure out God's plan for your life, or you're toast.

I've heard such things, often when someone has died. Yet I hear something very different in the Gospel of John with the Word, and keep my words, and keep my commandment. Jesus in this Great Discourse is not laying out a detailed plan for his disciples, rather he is preparing them for life each day - a life lived faithfully, filled with love for neighbor, even for the enemy. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete (I love that Greek word) will help you.

Jesus declares, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Anthony and Hallie, you graduate into a world which gives you every reason to be anxious, to be troubled, to be afraid. And, you will face real dangers and you will need to take risks. Climate change, economic disparity, policies and politics of exclusion resulting in injustice for many - these and others you will face. And Jesus has prepared you to remember and to be intentional about "keep my word", about faith and life.

Jesus prepares his followers, and that includes you Hallie and Anthony along with the rest of us who are baptized - marked with the sign of the cross and the name of Jesus. Jesus prepares you to live in this world as a disciple of Christ, bringing God's creative and life-giving word to the challenges we face. You may hear, like Paul in the first reading, "Come over to

Macedonia and help us." And Paul went, found a place he supposed people gathered to pray, and met Lydia. Lydia became the founder of a congregation in that community which became Paul's favorite church.

"Peace I leave with you" will open your ears and eyes for such visions and give you grace to "keep my word".

"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

So I say to you again, Grace and Peace.

Amen.