

Sermon: “Never Graduate”

Text: Luke 5: 1 - 11

“Never Graduate”. That may appear to be an odd declaration on Graduate Sunday. “Never Graduate”. The seniors are sitting there thinking, “Man – now you tell me.” Never Graduate.

We live in a world that is focused on graduating. Success and achievement is measured by graduation – not just from school but from events and experiences and relationships. We are very often focused on the goal line, the end result. We press on through events and life to get to the completion of whatever task is before us. We live to graduate.

Graduates – you will be tempted to define life by the achievement or completion of certain event because that is what we, as adults, have taught you.

Graduating from high school; graduating from college.

I’m a list person. It would probably be more accurate to introduce myself as “Hello, my name is Melissa and I am a list-maker.” The assessment of whether my day was a success or a failure is directly related to the number of items on my list that have been checked off. In fact, if I did things during the day that I had not written on my list, I go back and write them on my list and then check them off! Sick, I know.

I’ve done life that way as well. When I was in college, I was very focused on the end of college. I would have a calendar posted on the wall and the days that marked the end of a semester were usually circled and starred. Then, as I completed each day I would color it in or mark through it as I marched my way towards “graduation”.

I was so focused on the end that I failed to recognize the gift of each day.

Let’s look at the disciples here. Especially Peter. They think they have it together. They believe there is nothing new under the sun for them to learn. And in walks Jesus – who is here to prove otherwise.

Peter and the fishermen have been fishing for years. This is their livelihood. They could repair nets in their sleep. They probably had local fisherman contests. Some Saturday everyone would gather down on the shore for a big fish fry. And mid-afternoon, they'd call for all the fishermen to gather on the shore for the net repairing competition. There would be Peter and the others – blindfolded and poised for the event to begin. The pigeon would go off and they'd begin. They were fishermen. If there was one thing they knew, it was how to fish.

And in walks Christ.

When I read this passage, I envision sometimes a humorous scene here. You know Jesus had a sense of humor and experienced a pure and loving enjoyment being with humanity. I always imagine Jesus getting in the boat with Peter and beginning to talk with him. Then, I can see this sly grin coming across Christ's face. And then he begins to rock back and forth. Like this. Grinning at Peter from across the boat. Perhaps Peter meets Jesus' gaze and half-heartedly laughs.

“Funny, Jesus. Okay, you can stop now.” And Jesus instead leans a little more to the right and to the left – upsetting Peter's sense of comfort. “Jesus, really, that's enough. You're going to flip the boat!” Jesus smiles back, “That's okay. I can walk on water.”

Obviously this account was left out of the gospel recordings but I can still see it in my mind. Have you ever been in Peter's spot? Sitting comfortably and balanced in your place that you know so well and Jesus begins to rock the boat back and forth.

You know what I'm talking about. We know ourselves. We are pros on our own lives. We've got the world figured out

This passage in Luke is when Christ is first calling the disciples. Disciples. That word means to be a student of, a learner. Jesus is calling them to be a student of Himself, a lifelong learner of God. Jesus did not call these men up because they had graduated from the Christian Faith. It was not for their Christian knowledge or for seminary degrees or for the perfect way in which they lived out their faith. Christ

saw a willingness to learn, vulnerability, a teachable spirit. Albeit maybe a very challenging teachable spirit, but one nevertheless.

Author Richard Foster states that “arrogance and a teachable spirit are mutually exclusive.” They are oil and water.

You know why it is impossible to graduate? Because we are in relationship with a living God. There is a natural ebb and flow, a dance between God and God’s children. There is response. As people in intimate relationship with a living God, we are never finished. We are always on a journey and the journey is where the true learning and living exists.

Leonard Sweet, a wonderful author and gifted motivator, speaks of the need for believers to always be teachable. “Pilgrims are not expert in anything. Pilgrims are students of everything and everyone. Pilgrims never graduate. We are students sitting lifelong and one day, eternity-long at Jesus’ feet.” (63).

Ways to Never Graduate:

1. Study. One of the central ways God uses to change us is study. The mind is renewed by applying it to those things that will transform it. (Romans 12:2) Study books, Scripture; Life experiences – both success and failures; be a student of nature and people. John Muir, an avid lover of nature said that “Every natural object is a conductor of divinity.” God reveals truth to us in so many ways. Often we are missing it because we aren’t opened to being taught.

Learn to be a student of life and allow God to be your master teacher.

2. Step out of comfort and depend on God. “When we allow ourselves to become rooted in the routine, we run the risk of missing out on great fruit.” Gene Appel

I’ve heard more than one parent complain that their teenager thinks he or she knows it all. I wonder if God would make that same complaint of His children. Do we think we know it all? Do we refuse to have teachable spirits?

With God, the true learning and knowledge comes in the journey, not the arrival at the destination. With God, it is not about graduating. It is about learning. Always being teachable.

Just as we as individuals should never graduate, the church must never graduate either. The church is in living relationship with God as well.

Peter has graduated. He believes he has the answers. But God has more to teach him.

Peter's loyalty was to the law. God challenges what Peter thinks he understands. And it isn't like God springs something entirely new or out of character. Jesus had already told his disciples that they were to share the gospel with all nations. But Peter and the others had not comprehended. They had not taken hold of that truth.

“We must not make our preferences God's precepts.”
What is in the blanket that God is holding for you?

Invitation:

Some of you may regard this invitation time as an opportunity for those who have unfinished business with God. Those who have never graduated. Precisely. The altar is for all of us.

Jesus wants to get into your boat. vulnerability.

Christ wants to be invited to come into our boats and teach us new things. But there needs to be an openness, a vulnerability, a faith that believes that God will never harm you. He will never throw you into the deep end without making sure you can stay afloat.

Have you ever been around a small child when they are exposed to something new that they have never seen before or that they can't understand? There is an immediate curiosity. You can almost see the wheels inside their head spinning. They want to know more. They have a hunger to learn.

Are you still awed by God? Are you curious to know more about our Creator? If not, it cannot be because God ceases to be amazing any longer. So if we do not stand in amazement at God or do not hunger for more experiences with God, it can only be originating in us.

In 1999 John Stanford, the superintendent of the Seattle school system, was facing one of the toughest battles of his life – leukemia. Before his death, he inspired the people of Seattle to believe in the public school system again, and to work to change it. When people asked him how he was doing, or how the schools were faring, he would say, “Perfect – and improving.”

How wonderful a response this would be for our own spiritual journeys. Perfect . . . and improving, How powerful and descriptive would this be when someone asks how First Baptist Church is doing in our journey with God? Perfect and improving.