



The Day Christ's People Graduated:

Endings and Beginnings

Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost and Graduate Recognition Sunday

June 4, 2006

This is the story of the day when Christ's people graduated. For three years they had walked with their teacher, Jesus, absorbing as much as they could from him. But when Jesus was killed on the cross, then school was over, or so it seemed until three days later when Jesus rose. And then fifty days later, on Pentecost, came graduation day. Graduation/Pentecost Day was a day of whirlwind change for the students of Jesus. It was a day to say goodbye to the past – goodbye to the days when they walked behind a flesh and blood teacher. It was a day to say hello to the future – hello to the new adventure of walking with a spiritual Comforter and guide called the Holy Spirit. The disciples had to say goodbye to the old body of Christ; they were now saying hello to BEING the body of Christ for the world themselves. So Pentecost was the day when Christ's people graduated.

Now you seniors are graduating; this is your own day of change and transition. You will be saying a lot of goodbyes to teachers and classmates. If you plan to move out of town, you will be saying goodbye to your family and goodbye to important parts of Wilson, such as Bojangles on Wednesday nights. And you will be saying hello to lots of new adventures: new jobs, or new classes and professors and friends.

That's why I've read these words from the second chapter of Acts. On Pentecost, the Spirit of God came and led the believers from endings to new beginnings. On your graduation, that same Spirit of God will lead you from endings to new beginnings.

I. GOD SPECIALIZES IN ENDING AND BEGINNINGS.

In all of the goodbye's you'll have to make in the coming weeks, God will be with you. In all of the hello's you'll be saying when you go to work or to college, the Spirit of God will be with you.

In other words, in the next few months, God is going to get a lot bigger for you than you had thought God was. You will go to places and situations so new and so out there that you wouldn't really expect God to be around. But you will find that God is already present and at work in the new school you're headed to, or the new job you're headed to. God is at work on campus through many Christian groups like Baptist Campus Ministry, and through Christ-like professors and friends. Wherever you're headed in the next few weeks, God has gotten there first is and is waiting for you. That is how much bigger God is than you once thought. The Holy Spirit of God is great enough to make good on the promise to be with you always.

And along the way, God's Spirit will be guiding you and teaching you whatever you'll need to know to face your new challenges. In the fifty days from the crucifixion to the resurrection to the ascension to Pentecost, the followers of Jesus became fully aware of how much they did not know. Everything they thought they could depend on was turned upside down. A dead man had come back alive. The Spirit and power of the Almighty had been poured out upon each of them. If just that much could happen to them in a few weeks, then what on earth might happen to them next? The disciples had no idea of what was to come. But they had this assurance: the Holy Spirit of God would teach them everything they would need to know about the brave new world they faced. The Spirit would remind them of what Jesus had told them. The Spirit would even give them words to say in new situations.

Just so, you have no idea of what is to come in this next chapter of your lives. But whatever comes, God's Holy Spirit will continue to give you the guidance of Jesus. In the classroom, you will face intellectual challenges, but the God's Spirit will help you relate your new classroom learning to faith. In the workplace, you will face ethical challenges, but the Holy Spirit will help you relate your values to your daily life and work.

So, God's Holy Spirit will teach you what you need to know to get through each situation. The God who specializes in endings and beginnings will help each of you with every transition you face.

II. GOD ALSO SPECIALIZES IN HELPING NEW GRADUATES FIND THEIR VOICE

God will help you find your voice. Now of course you can talk, but what I mean is something more than physical speech. Take a novelist who writes his first novel, but the publisher sends it back. So the novelist tries again, writes a second book, and sends this one back to the publisher. And this time the publisher writes back a note of acceptance: "Congratulations. This book is much better. You have found your voice as a writer." People talk the same way about artists who finally develop their own unique style. They find their voice on the canvas, and their paintings speak.

Before Pentecost, the disciple Peter had lost his voice, maybe even literally. On the night of Jesus' trial, Peter couldn't even talk straight to a serving woman who asked if Peter were not one of Jesus' followers. All he could do was cuss and say "I don't know the man." He had lost his voice.

But on Pentecost, the Spirit of God came and filled the room where the believers were. In fact, Holy Spirit had made such a ruckus that the people outside crowded around to find out what was going on. Someone needed to explain it to them, but who? Then, of all people, it was Peter who stepped forward and began to speak. The Spirit of God had descended like tongues of fire on each believer, including Peter. Peter had found his tongue. God had helped him find his voice. And Peter, who once had been too

scared to say “boo” to a serving woman, was now preaching the gospel in broad daylight to the very people who had killed his Lord:

Men of Judea and all you residents of Jerusalem, let me explain this to you, and give close attention to my words. ... (Acts 2:14)

...and then Peter proceeded to tell the crowd that the very one they had killed was not just Jesus of Nazareth, but Jesus the Lord of all. Peter had found his voice to explain what God was doing.

I tell you this, Seniors, because you too will be facing strange and nerve-wracking situations, before which you will clam up and not be able to make a peep. But the promise of the Holy Spirit for Peter is the promise of the Holy Spirit to you. God will help you find your voice. And most of all, the Holy Spirit of God will help you find your voice to explain what God is doing in your life. The Holy Spirit of God will give you something to say.

The Holy Spirit of God is just what is needed by anyone who is going through a great transition of life, because the Holy Spirit specializes in endings and beginnings, and the Holy Spirit specializes in helping us find our voice in new situations, and one more thing:

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD SPECIALIZES IN SENDING...

God with us specializes in sending people out into new situations with a new mission. In the case of the disciples in the upper room on Pentecost Day, the Spirit sent them out into the streets to explain what God was doing. And then the Spirit kept on sending them, into Judea, and then further into Samaria, and then further, out to the very corners of the world. And everywhere they went, their mission was to make sure that everyone knew that anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. So the believers were sent across the world by the Holy Spirit. Sending is the Spirit’s specialty.

And now you Seniors: graduation is your “sending out” day in more ways than one. You are being sent out from your old schools to new jobs and new schools. But more than that, God’s Holy Spirit is sending you out.

Now, how is God sending you out? Is God sending you out as knights sent out on some quest? Is God sending you out as missionaries sent to foreign fields? During all the graduation speeches you will be hearing, you will be called many things: the future of the world, the hope of our community, the leaders of tomorrow. Actually I like to think of you as being sent out like ... viruses. Yes, you are like computer viruses about to be sent off into cyberspace and infect the information systems of the world. No kidding. Here are the programs you are carrying within you:

Blessed are the poor, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.
Blessed are those who show mercy, for they will have mercy shown them.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Love your enemies.
Whoever would be greatest among you must first be a servant.
No one has greater love than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.
Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

This is the binary code that has been implanted in you, otherwise known as the teachings of Jesus. And wherever you go, you will be infecting the information systems of the world with this virus. And wherever this virus of the gospel is implanted, it will turn things upside down, it will cause systems and kingdoms to crash, it will re-program the world.

Just as the Holy Spirit sent those first believers into every corner of the earth to turn the world upside down with the gospel, so the Holy Spirit of God sends you. The Holy Spirit sends you with the promise that the Spirit will always be with you. The Holy Spirit sends you with the promise that God will help you find your own voice in this world. The Holy Spirit sends you to spread the teachings of Jesus like a computer virus that will send every human system crashing down.

And so we send you. We send you with our love, we send you with our pride in you, and we send you with our constant prayers.

-- Douglas E. Murray