**READINGS:**

**SERMON**

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!** We are in the midst of graduation season…graduate school, college, high school, kindergarten and preschool. If you can believe it, my Abby graduates from preschool this Friday! Of course, preschool graduations will be pretty simple, with the kids singing songs and getting their certificates. But high school, college and graduate school ceremonies all include speeches, either from valedictorians or someone who is chosen to give a commencement address.

When I graduated from high school many, many years ago, I was the salutatorian, which mean second highest grade point average in the class. Its not as impressive as it sounds…I have 36 kids in my graduating class. But at my school, it meant I got to give a brief speech. I couldn’t tell you now what I said in that speech. But I can tell you that I agonized over it. I was trying to figure out what I could say to my classmates as we all prepared to go our separate ways on our particular chosen paths. That’s probably what every person who has to speak at a graduation is feeling. What can they say to these graduates that will mean something or that will help or encourage them as they begin this new phase of life? It’s a challenging task.

But I recently saw a valedictorian speech from a few years ago that I thought was quite memorable, so I shared it on Facebook. The young man had decided that he was going to work his butt off so he could attain the title of valedictorian. So he did, he focused, he worked hard and he accomplished his goal. He talked about his name being called at the senior awards ceremony and how great it felt for about 15 seconds. But then the 16th second came and he though, was that it? He realize that all that hard work, all the sacrifices he made weren’t in the end as fulfilling as he thought they’d be. And he reflected on those sacrifices, the things he missed out on, the relationship that may have suffered, it turns out it wasn’t worth it. So he wisely advised his classmates that, while working hard is important, they should not let striving for goals or money or success get in the way of their relationships. That was certainly a message worth remembering and a good message for his classmates and they entered the next phase of their lives.

This weekend is the 6th Sunday in the season of Easter. You may have noticed that the gospel passages for the first few Sundays after Easter relate post-resurrection stories. That means, they are stories of the resurrected Christ with his disciples. The strange thing about the Easter season is that, as we get further along in it, the gospel passages take us back to the time that Jesus gathered with his disciples before his crucifixion. But if we pay close attention, the words of Jesus today are pointing us toward the festival that commemorates the Ascension, which is celebrated this Thursday. And Jesus’ mention of the Holy Spirit points us toward the festival of Pentecost, which is coming up in 2 weeks.

We can understand that the tone of Jesus’ words here are a lot like that of someone giving a speech at graduation. While Jesus’ words here are spoken before his crucifixion, he is really preparing them for his Ascension, when his bodily presence will leave them. This whole section from John’s gospel, from chapters 13-17, is known as the Farewell Discourse. What Jesus says here is intended to stick with his followers when he isn’t with them any longer. As important as these words are for them, they are just as important for us who have never known the bodily presence of Christ among us. How do we keep from getting pulled this way or that way, what is it that will assure us in the faith, that will hold us fast regardless of what is happening in life?

In this section, Jesus begins with this beautiful promise, “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.” In all honesty, I’ve never noticed this verse before, where it said, “we will come…and make our home with them.” Earlier in chapter 14 a verse that we’re probably more familiar with contains Jesus’ words, “In my Father’s house there are many rooms…I go to prepare a place for you.” But notice the promise here, where Jesus says we will come…and make our home with them. When the time comes that Jesus can no longer be seen, he wants his followers to know that he is not far off somewhere out there. God, through Christ makes a home among his followers, among us.

In verse 26, Jesus continues by promising that the Holy Spirit will be sent as the one who reminds Jesus’ followers of everything he said. We will talk about the Holy Spirit in a few weeks. But what I will say now is, this is unlike trying to remember the important message of a commencement speech. This is a presence, a spirit from God right here with us who will remind us about what Jesus’ taught. We do not have to rely on our own memories…thank God! The Holy Spirit is with us to remind us what Jesus said and taught. As Lutherans we believe that the Holy Spirit is responsible for giving us faith, for strengthening our faith. We don’t do this faith thing all by ourselves…the Holy Spirit does the heavy lifting to remind us of God’s love for us, Jesus’ commandment to love one another and the promise of resurrection, which is that God is here in our midst.

And lastly, Jesus says in verse 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.” Jesus’ promise of peace is for us when we feel disconnected from God or when all is not right in our world. In this whole section, Jesus is assuring his followers, who see him \*here\* that, even though they will soon no longer see him, his absence from view actually makes possible God’s nearness, God’s presence.

This is a promise for us as well. The peace of Christ assures our hearts that God has not left us, will not leave us, will never abandon us. Jesus promises that he does not give as the world gives. We can probably imagine that the reference to “the world” means that the world gives and takes according to what is deserved or earned or what can be taken and gained. But Jesus give out of the love of God which cannot be deserved or earned and cannot be taken or gained. When it comes to the love, the presence of God, our hearts do not need to be troubled or afraid, because, through Christ is here for us.

While commencement addresses are generally full of advice for young people beginning a new phase of life, these words of Jesus are important for our hearts at any and all points in our lives. Christ’s promise to be with us, the promise that the Holy Spirit will remind us is important when we feel alone, when we think we’ve messed up, when life gets difficult, when we are uncertain. No matter what you are going through now, do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. Amen.