

DAY OF PENTECOST/ HS GRADUATE RECOGNITION

May 24, 2015

Romans 8:22-27

"A Very Special Prayer Partner"

Pastor Saul Stensvaag

25 years ago, a little book by Robert Fulghum was a best-seller. It was entitled, *"All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten."* It's a light-hearted little book, but it gives a real message. Fulghum says: *"All I really needed to know about how to live a meaningful life I already knew. It isn't all that complicated. ...wisdom wasn't at the top of the graduate-school mountain, but there in the sand pile at Kindergarten. These are the things I learned: (HS seniors, you might want to take notes.)*

Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat.

Flush.

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Take a nap every afternoon.

When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.

Be aware of wonder.

Remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned - the biggest word of all - LOOK.

Fulghum goes on to say,

"Think what a better world it would be if the whole world had cookies and milk about two o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap. Or if all governments had a basic policy to always put things back where they found them and to clean up their own mess.

And it is still true, no matter how old you are - when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.

Graduates, you could do worse than to follow these guidelines from Kindergarten.

And when it comes to faith, I think you all learned everything you need to know back in Confirmation class!

Last week I pulled out the faith papers you wrote as 9th graders back in 2012, and you truly did understand the basics.

Of course, the journey of faith is a never-ending process of growing and learning more and more about God and our savior and how to live out our faith. Still, pretty much everything you need to know was in those faith papers.

So let me remind you, in your own words, of just a few of the things you already knew and believed back in 9th grade.

“I love God because he created the earth, and gave us family and shelter. ...His love blankets me, making me feel safe and warm when I’m feeling sad and alone.”

You all knew back then that God’s got your back, no matter what you may be going through: *“It is through troubled times that I’m comforted in knowing that I am never alone because Jesus is with me at all times.*

“I know that no matter how big or small my problems, I am blessed to have God’s endless love so that I am able to overcome any obstacles.”

Or, *“My faith is really important to me to help me through everything that is happening in my life. My faith helps me better understand why we have to go through difficult things and that God isn’t punishing us.”*

Some of you weren’t afraid to admit that sometimes you have doubts, or struggles in your faith. *“I know a lot of people who have a strong faith, and that’s really great for them. But that’s not always how it is for me. Some days my faith in God will be really strong, but other days it’s really pretty weak. The one thing that helps me keep believing, though, is knowing that God’s compassion for us never stops. Ever. It’s infinite. God will always take care of us. Always.”*

Back then, you knew just how amazing God’s grace is: *“The most important thing I learned is that God will always love me and that He will always forgive my sins, even when I think I’m not deserving of love or forgiveness.”* Or as another one of you put it: *“God will always love me no matter how big I mess up.”*

One of you used Biblical references to describe sin and forgiveness: *“I always want to do the right thing, but sometimes I don’t. It’s kind of like the parables of the prodigal son, the lost sheep, or the lost coin. Sometimes I get lost and make bad choices. God will find me and have joy at my return.”*

One of you said the same basic truth, using theological terms: *“One of the most important things I learned was the phrase, ‘saved by grace through faith.’ This is a good a reminder that I don’t always have to be a perfect person or do specific things to be saved.*

No matter how many times I may fail in life or feel like I've done wrong, I am saved by God's grace because I have faith in His son."

Many of you showed that you understand that you are called to serve others. Here's just one example: *"I'm going to continue to let God use me to help make a difference in the world."*

You knew, even then, that this whole faith thing is not just a solitary quest – something we have to do all on our own.

One of the class members, someone whose family was really struggling back then, wrote: *"God put other people in place for me to guide me on the path. He's also blessed me with other families to love me. Thank you God for blessing me, and Saul, thank you for teaching me to believe."*

Well, I certainly can't take credit for teaching her to believe, but I am honored to think that God may have used me in a small way to help her along on her faith journey. Just as He has used many members of this congregation to help these graduates in their faith walk.

There are many other wonderful quotes, but here's a favorite: *"Not too long ago I bought my brother a trailer to sit in and ride behind my bike and every time I take him for a ride I see the joy it brings him. I think this is the same feeling God gets when he sees us running home to him wanting to be forgiven. I know my life will take me many places. But I believe my faith will always return me home, to God."*

I believe that, too. And remember, God doesn't just wait for us to come running home to him. Because sometimes, we become so screwed up we may not even know how we can return to Him.

But that's okay, because God comes after us relentlessly, seeking to bring us back home where we belong whenever we wander off.

So as you can see, graduates, everything you need to know in your faith journey you learned back in Confirmation. And, thanks to you, all of the adults here, who have maybe forgotten what we learned way back in a another Century when we took confirmation have also gotten a refresher course!

But now, as we send you off, I want to remind you of one more thing that I maybe didn't emphasize enough back then.

When you were 8th graders, you were all given prayer partners – adults who agreed to pray for you regularly.

I'm sure most of them have been praying for you ever since, and will continue to pray for you in the coming months and years. How wonderful to know that someone is lifting up your name to God in prayer!

But today I want to tell you that since the day you were born, you've also had another prayer partner – a very special prayer partner indeed.

It's right there in today's second lesson from Romans: *"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."*

Did you hear that? The Holy Spirit prays for us! It's like **we have a divine prayer partner**.

All those times when you're struggling in your faith; those times when you're scared about the future, or when you've really messed up; all those times, **you have a silent prayer partner** who intercedes on your behalf with God the father.

There will be times when you don't have the words to pray. But that's okay. Because when all you can do is sigh, **THAT'S THE HOLY SPIRIT PRAYING FOR YOU!**

So, in the coming days – in the coming years, please, please don't forget the basics you learned in confirmation. And be sure to remember this one more thing: the Holy Spirit – **God the verb – goes with you and will always lift you up in prayer, even when you forget to pray or don't know how to pray.**

It may also comfort you to know that many, many of us here at First Lutheran, besides your family, will also be remembering you in prayer.

But this prayer partner thing isn't just a one-way street. So, please, when you think of it, remember First Lutheran congregation and its pastors in your prayers, too.

Oh, and remember:

- share everything.
- Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
- Flush.
- And take a nap every afternoon. Amen