

TRINITY – HS SENIOR RECOGNITION

May 29, 2016

Galatians 1:1-12

"Holding Onto the Gospel"

Pastor Saul Stensvaag

Today we celebrate with our High School graduates, and bless them as they begin a new chapter in their lives. Now, it's typical at a graduation for the main speaker to tell the graduates everything they need to know to succeed in life.

And so you might expect me to do the same. You know, preach a sermon about five keys to living as a Christian, with a catchy quote you can take with you, or something like that.

But I don't need to share with you today my wisdom on everything you need to know as a Christian. I don't need to preach about that, because you graduates **already know it all. (Which won't be a surprise to your parents, I'm sure.)**

How can I say that? How do I know? I know because three years ago, when you wrote your Confirmation Faith Papers you made it clear that you get it – you understand the important basics of the faith.

I know I've used this comparison before, but it's just too perfect to pass up!

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. These are the things I learned:

Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

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.

Fulghum goes on to say,

“Think what a better world it would be if everyone 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.

But when it comes to faith, you learned everything you need to know back in Confirmation class!

So today I'm just going to remind you of what you already know! I'm going to refresh your memories by reading a few quotes from your faith papers.

If you can remember what you knew then, and if you can live it, you will have a happy and fulfilling life as a child of God

And the rest of us can also learn from our young people. Here are some of the things they said three years ago – all of which are worth hearing again today.

These are direct quotes:

“I love God because God is the only person who I know will love me no matter what I do.

I know I sometimes do things that can make other people not like me, but I know with God he will always love me and that makes me love him even more. God is my eternal friend!”

“I will always remember the story of the son who returned home. The father was so happy that his son had returned that he threw a big party. God is like the father in the story because he is always there to welcome you back.”

“I know that God will always have my back. God will always catch me when I fall. And God loves me more than anyone else ever could.”

“When Jesus died on the cross, I’m sure God was sad. That means God can understand when I’m sad.”

“Jesus will pop into your life and help you, not when you think you need it but when He knows you need it most.”

Back then, you students all understood the basics of the faith, and of the Christian walk:

“I believe that I am saved by grace through faith because Jesus loves me and he died for me. To me this means I’m forgiven for my sins and I’ll be going to heaven!”

“God wants me to be kind, caring, and compassionate to others and myself.”

Lastly, you understood the importance of being connected with a congregation and worshipping regularly. You said:

“I will keep going to church to be renewed and restored, and most importantly to keep growing in the faith. I am proud to be a Christian.”

See, just like I said, you graduates have already learned what you need to know as a Christian. You learned it back in Confirmation. Just remember it all, and you will do just fine.

But, since we’re celebrating your graduation from High School, I will give you a famous quotation that you can take with you. It’s one of my favorites, from the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. He said:

“Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve.

You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

My young friends, and all you old friends as well, the Christian life – the life that will give you the most fulfillment and happiness – is the life lived in service to others.

This is a message that Jesus taught when He said: *“Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will gain it.”*

And it’s a truth modeled by many Christians down through the ages – saints who learned **the incredible joy and fulfillment that comes from living for others.**

It can be a challenge, of course. Living one’s life for others can seem a daunting task.

But guess what? Each of you graduates, and **each of the rest of you gathered here today, are capable of living such a life.**

Why? **How can you do something so difficult?** You can do it because **you have, what Martin Luther King called A HEART FULL OF GRACE AND A SOUL GENERATED BY LOVE.**

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul says that *“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”*

Class of 2016, and all you other brothers and sisters in this room, remember what you already know!

And **remember that God’s love have been poured into your heart. So you already have a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love.**

Hold onto this incredible Gospel.

BELIEVE IT! AND BE GREAT!

Be great by serving others. IT’S WHAT YOU WERE PUT ON THIS PLANET TO DO.

And **now a word for you parents.** I want to remind you that, as hard as it is to believe, **GOD LOVES YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER EVEN MORE THAN YOU DO.** Just think of that! So we can entrust our children into God's loving hands.

The other day I was listening to a recording of a song the High School choir sang way back when my daughter was a member.

I think the words can be a comfort to us when we worry about the human tendency to foolishly turn away from the God of our childhood:

If I forget, Yet God remembers!

If these hands of mine, cease from their clinging,

Yet the hands divine

*hold me so firmly that I cannot fall.
And if sometimes
I am too tired to call for Him to help me,
then he reads the prayer
unspoken in my heart,
and lifts my care.*

Do you see, graduates? It's the same thing I tried to tell you again and again in confirmation. God claimed you as his beloved son or daughter when you were baptized. And God will never, ever let you go.

Even if we forget, still God remembers.

And even if our hands cease from their clinging to God and God's promises, the hands divine – God's hands – will hold us so firmly that we cannot fall.

Graduates, family, friends, and church members, I want each of you to leave this place this morning with these promises echoing in your ears.

God will never let you go.

God will never let you go.

GOD WILL NEVER, EVER LET YOU GO!

And because that is true, I know that what I said earlier is also true.

Each of you can become great. Because each of you can serve.

Remember, God has already blessed you with a heart full of grace and a soul generated by His unconditional love.

Now use that heart and soul to become great! Amen.