

On this Graduation Sunday,
we hold many things in our Christian hearts and hands...
We celebrate and reflect on the Trinity.
We call our church to ministries of Peace with Justice.
And - we're living in a pandemic.
And - we're living in a time of great truth-telling about racial injustice.
There's a lot on our minds and hearts today, so let's begin this time with
some centering...

*Lord of life and breath, bring us to this moment,
Quiet our minds, calm our nerves, settle our bodies,
Open our hearts, even when it hurts, even when it's uncomfortable,
And keep us steady in your love, sustaining us with your peace.*

We've always always known that peace with justice was an aspiration -
Something we work very hard for,
and yet know there will always be more to do.
We've always known that racial equality was not yet achieved.
Yet more so in our faces today are the uncomfortable realities
That patience has run out. Understandably.
We've always known there was room to grow, but perhaps,
we did not realize how bad things really still are.
For those of us living in privilege, like myself,
we confess, we forgot and didn't see, and weren't aware,
as we might be today.

Our country has grown not just weary, but to a breaking point,
And to an unwillingness to stand by and watch hate continue to rule.
We are fed up with *all* of the isms - sexism, racism, heterosexism,
and *all* of the fear and hate of "the other".

Some are standing up peacefully,
while others begin difficult conversations,
while others are doing so in other ways of advocacy,
while yet others mourn and cry out in their own ways.

I am reminded of Jeremiah 31:15:

“A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more.”

We are at a point where offering mere comfort and sympathy is not enough.

We see Rachel in every mother of color - in her fear, anger, and tears. Comfort is refused, because what every mother needs is justice. What mothers want is not sympathy, but a safe world for their children.

And at this threshold in our history, I invite you to step into our Scriptures this morning...

Psalm 8 beginning at verse 3:

When I look up at your skies,
at what your fingers made—
the moon and the stars
that you set firmly in place—
what are human beings
that you think about them;
what are human beings
that you pay attention to them?

You've made them only slightly less than divine,
crowning them with glory and grandeur.

(end of reading)

We are invited to look upon the grand scheme of creation
- and reflect on who we are, really, as humanity.

We are small, and just another part of creation.

And yet we are loved and cared for.

And we are responsible for each other and the whole of creation.

The psalm reminds us that God shares

God's creative power with us.

We have the power to move creation closer to God's vision.

And then the passage from Matthew this morning,

Which we call the great commission,

Has Jesus again, sharing authority with us:

"Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations...."

And then that reminder that repeats itself so often in the Scriptures,

"...Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

We are not alone.

We share in God's creative power and redemption,

and we are not alone in our work.

The timing people who graduate this year have a lot on their minds.

They are graduating in a strange tsunami of civil unrest and disease...

They see with fresh eyes the dangers, the pain, and the trauma

That comes from a top-down society, still hung up on protecting power at all costs.

(And not the kind of Divine power we've been talking about.)

I'm talking here about self-serving power.)

Graduates see that what we're doing as a society isn't working.

It may be working a few, and that few may be us,

but it's not working for all of God's people.

I've heard a lot of messages the grads are getting this year.

In many of these messages, we are, *unfairly*, calling upon them to fix it all.

To be fair, they were born into this brokenness, shortly after 9/11.

To be fair, they can't fix this on their own promise of potential.

To be fair, these challenges must be met by all of us.

They are full of such promise we say,

They are our brightest and best hope for a better future.

No pressure, right?

We are calling on our youth to save us,

and yet are we are willing to show up for the work ahead as well?

Graduates, yes, you are bright and give us hope,

But we must give to you and this upcoming generation of leaders our willingness.

Here are the graduation presents I hope we can give you:

1. **Our willingness to look within ourselves** and acknowledge our own grasping for not just for power, but also for comfort and ease of life. You can help us with this work of introspection, go ahead and call us out on our complacency.
2. I hope we can give you **our willingness to consider what sharing our resources might look like**, and be ready to give from what we have. Not just physical resources, but privilege and voice. If we want more diverse voices at the table, at some point, we have to be willing to be quiet and listen. We taught you to share in kindergarten, now we're asking you to remind us how that works.

3. Let's give our graduates and young people **our willingness to not have it all right now at the lowest possible cost.** We live in a "one-click"-to-buy world where things show up at your doorstep in one day at a low cost. We live in a world where our pleasures are considered essential, no matter the cost to employees.
4. And lastly, let's give the next generation **our willingness to have been wrong, and to discover with them, what the next right thing is.** We need to be willing to be wrong here. We need to be willing to own our part in oppression, so that we can make a very drastic course correction in our history. We need to discover with you graduates, what those next right steps are. So I pray we can give you open hearts and minds to what those steps are.

Class of 2020 - we need to pray today not only for you and the innovation, and cures, and advances, and ministry, and justice we want you to bring - but we ask you, to pray for us.

For those who *you* will lead, to have willing and open hearts, ready to learn and listen.

Most of you, we baptised nearly two decades ago.
Sometime in the early 2000's.

Your parents made these vows for you....

To "renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,
reject the evil powers of this world,
and repent of your sin"

To "accept the freedom and power God gives you
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves"

And "confess Jesus Christ as your Savior,
put your whole trust in his grace,
and promise to serve him as your Lord,

in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races.”

In the name of the God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, sometime around 2012-2013, you took those vows for yourself.

I encourage you today to ask your parents to help you figure out what year you were baptized, and what year you were confirmed.

And adults, please, do the same, figure out what years these were.

What was going on in the world then?

From what evil were we resisting?

What injustice and oppression did our world know?

Consider how you, your community, your church, were about this work. Was it effective? Was it heartfelt? Was it transformative?

It is 2020.

It's probably not hard for you to name those evils, injustices, and acts of oppression today.

But as you do hold all of those things in your hands and hearts, remember that you also at these times, confessed your Jesus Christ as your Savior and put your whole trust in his grace.

Facing today's injustices with hope and conviction to be about the work of justice and compassion - wow - that takes a lot of trust in grace, doesn't it?

Graduates and congregation... - you need not save the God's creation, Jesus has done that work.

Now, the Holy Spirit will lead us, in the redeeming and healing yet to be done.

When I read the “great commission” today,
I hear also, a great commencement speech or calling -
teach the world what Jesus has taught you.
It’s the best starting place.

Open up the Gospels, learn what Jesus taught. Start there.
And always return to there.

Love.

Compassion.

Justice.

True peace.

Prayer.

Service.

Listen.

Amen.