

2024-04-28 5th Sunday of Easter Baccalaureate SERMON

By The Reverend Cheryl Kester-Schmidt

Look at you! Madison and Ty, you are finally here! You started kindergarten, learned academic basics, and now you are graduating from high school. We are so proud of you. Your emotions are probably all over the place – as you remember joyful times and sad partings. It is a time of moving from your comfort zone into a whole new world. This may be a difficult time as you transition from youth to young adult, but you will move through the challenges with Jesus.

Emily and Jenny, you have navigated those transition years from high school through your college years. You have moved from minimum wage jobs to vocations with benefits. Then you decided to get the same degree at the same time. Pretty smart as you could be there for one another filling in the blanks where needed. Be proud of your accomplishments, we are! The Census for 2020 says you have moved into a select group of 21 million folks with master's degrees in the US. Congratulations!

You have all been prepared academically, but are you spiritual ready? Are you spiritually equipped to face life head on? I know your families and you are prepared. Good job! Mom and Dad!

As we continue to live in Christ, we are able to persevere through any challenges that come our way. The temptations of being human never leave us but in Christ all things are possible. Your temptation is to not do those things that Christ wants us to do to be better disciples and increase our faith and spirituality.

Madison and Ty, as you move into the world of college and Jenny and Emily as you move out of your comfort zone into the larger world, remember the Six Marks of Discipleship and practice them daily to increase your faith and spirituality.

In 2000, Lutheran Pastor Michael Foss, published the book Power Surge - Six marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church (Augsburg/Fortress). In the book, Pr. Foss tells the Church it needs to move from being membership oriented to making disciples the focus of our life together.

As disciples of Jesus Christ and members of Christ the Victor these are what we as individual disciples and corporate disciples of Christ strive for:

Pray daily – Prayer is to be at the center of our lives if we are to grow in faith. In prayer we are most intimate with God and build our relationship with Him by sharing your innermost hopes and needs. In prayer, we learn to listen to God’s direction for our lives. We are to pray daily at home, with and for family and friends, in worship and as you fellowship with other believers.

Worship weekly – Your life needs to center on worship. Madison and Ty, each of your colleges or universities will have campus ministries. Find it and gather with other like-minded students to lift your voice in praise, thanksgiving, prayer, and in celebration of Holy Communion. Your presence in worship benefits you and others. Worshipping regularly will help you to stay grounded while you are away from your families and friends. Being part of a faith community builds relationships and helps as

you transition to young adult. Just a hint, they will also feed you at least once a week.

Read Scripture daily – As disciples of Jesus Christ, the Bible is central to our life together in community as well as individually. God’s Word feeds us and challenges us to grow in faith. When we encounter the Bible daily as individuals, in small groups, or in worship, we are asked to stop, listen, ponder, and to be changed by God’s word. You can encounter God’s word in Bible Studies, having a regular scripture reading schedule, worship, devotionals, and inspirational readings. You will need to engage in God’s word daily and apply what you learn to your lives as followers of Jesus Christ.

Serve – When we serve our faith and spirituality grow. We are to practice our faith daily and one way is to serve in a Campus Ministry or in your church. In serving, we engage the world at large through - care for creation, worship and education. Serving benefits us more than the people we serve. Our mission field may be in the vocation we choose or in the classes we take

but may be within your family, your home congregation or the community you live in.

Share – Each of us has been gifted by God. We show our appreciation by sharing our time, talents, and treasure with others. These gifts are for the purpose of serving God. Giving out of our generosity is an intimate way of saying thank you to God for all we have received.

I know, thinking of sharing the little you have of your treasure may be daunting. When I went to Seminary, the expectation was that 10 % of my first fruits were to be given back to God's work. I worked a minimum wage job in the mail room. My paltry \$60 dollars a week did not go far and to give \$6 to God was hard. I stubbornly tried to justify not doing it. What I found was, giving my 10% was an opportunity for God's abundance to come back to me in the strangest and most creative of circumstances. Try it. It works.

Spiritual Friendships – When faced with a new reality such as entering college or a new town or a new vocation is our

life of discipleship can be lonely if we are not surrounded by other believers. Your church family has provided you opportunities to Working in the real world or go off to college the closeness of our family and friends may not be with you except in spirit. You will need to find like-minded friends with whom you can live your faith daily. Regularly attending worship and being part of campus ministry will help you to develop faith-filled relationships to strengthen your walk with God. Get involved!

Sometimes trouble and challenges come at us, instead of becoming a big puddle, grab your Bible and dig into Jesus' Word. Pray with confidence - God will give you the strength to persevere in the toughest of times. Christ promises were given to us in our Baptism. Believe your heavenly Father's hand will bring good out of whatever enters your life.

He is the Vine; we are the branches. When we stay connected to Him we bear fruit. God created us to glorify Him by producing that fruit. No matter what you do or where you go let the joy of Jesus, the peace of forgiveness, and the hope heaven

shine in your lives. Let patience, love, grace, kindness and forgiveness fill your relationships. Let the Good News of Jesus Christ be in the words you speak to others. The purpose of a vine branch is to produce grapes. Your purpose and mine is to produce the fruits of faith to the glory of God. Amen