

Those Who Journey With Us...

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Today is one of the most bittersweet and in many ways emotional Sundays of the year.... On one hand we get to celebrate these wonderful High School graduates who have been involved in the life of our church--but on the other hand we recognize that many of them will soon be headed away across the state and country as they begin the next stage of their lives.

And of course this year is even more meaningful to me personally, because this is the last Graduation Sunday that I will get to be a part of here at SRVUMC. This is a class that I have had the privilege to know for 6 years.....A class which I have always seen as "Small but mighty." This is a class made up of students who were involved in leadership at their school....there are actors, singers....band members, all sorts of amazing talents among them.

It was this class that helped show me the ropes when I first came to this church....at that time they had just finished up their first year in the youth program so they knew exactly how everything was supposed to work.

They showed me the different games we play at fall retreat and the important rituals that happen at youth group.

Through mission trips, youth groups, 30-hour famines, Freshman kidnaps, sports games, Sunday school classes, Disneyland trips, college road trips, Thursday Night Dinners out, choir concerts, Retreats at Monte Toyon, and the countless other hours we have spent together---I can tell you first hand that this group of graduates are a truly exceptional class and their leadership and presence will be greatly missed as they take the next step on their journeys.

Normally, at this service I take the opportunity to remind the graduating class of our 3 simple rules in the UMC: Do No Harm, Do Good, and Stay in Love with God.

But as you may recall I actually focused on those rules a few weeks ago in one of my sermons because I did think that I would have the incredible honor to preach at one more Graduation Sunday....but here I am....and I am truly grateful for this opportunity....

So instead of reminding the class of those three simple rules, I have the chance to offer an additional simple rule before they venture out to new opportunities...A rule that isn't an official statement of the United Methodist Church like the first 3 are, but nonetheless, I believe just as important... Cherish the ones who walk beside you.... (Repeat)

Over the years I have asked various graduating seniors to tell me one thing they are excited about leaving behind in High School....and of course there are many different answers...but the one I believe I have heard most often is "I am excited to leave behind all the drama that comes with High School."

And while I totally understand where they are coming from.....my first thought (which I never say out loud of course) is....oh there is plenty of drama after high school too...it might just be different kinds of drama....

Because as long as there have been people....there has been drama..... In fact, one of the places you can find a ton of stories about drama is our very own Bible...

So this morning, I have selected two stories, one from the Hebrew Testament and one from the New Testament to share with you about true friendship in the midst of a lot of Drama.

The first is about one of the most famous characters in the Hebrew Scriptures, David...and the friendship that he and Jonathon begin to form. So to give you an overview of the story:

David became a star overnight after defeating Goliath, and at first King Saul latched onto the young hero. But as David's star continued its rise, Saul became proportionally jealous. But there was one other thing that kept going up along with David's fame and Saul's fury—Jonathan's friendship with David.

Now, keep in mind that Jonathan was Saul's son and the next in line for the throne. It's easy to understand how Jonathan and David could have become friends originally—when Saul still favored David. But it's harder to understand their friendship as David's fame grew, especially in light of the Prophet Samuel's anointing of David as future king.

I have been reading a book that just came out a couple of weeks ago called by one of my Favorite Authors, his name is Rob Bell and the book is called ***The Bible: How an Ancient Library of Poems, Letters and Stories can change the way you think and feel about Everything.***

Quite a title I know....and in it....the author invited us to ask a couple of key questions when reading any scripture passage. 1) Why was this story so important to original writers that they wrote it down and preserved it? And 2) what is it about these words that have made them meaningful to people for the last 2,000 to 3,000 years.

And there are many answers to those questions that can be applied to this reading, but one of them is that this story shows the importance of humbly supporting one another when it comes to building a good friendship.

I believe that Jonathan trusted God and trusted his friend David enough not to get caught up in roles or titles.

To me, it looks like Jonathan knew that David and He each had a role to play....and no matter what the world says about whose role is more important, Jonathan knew that they were both equal in God's eyes.

Jonathan had every reason to turn from David. His father's anger and wrath was directed toward David. David was a threat to his future as king. There is no doubt that it was in many dangerous for Jonathan to be friends with David.

And yet, Jonathan's friendship with David continued to grow.

This story is a great example to us today in a world where we many are under the impression that in order to be successful you have to do whatever it takes... even if that means turning your back on your friends or those who God calls us to care about....

It's important to cherish and support those who journey alongside you in life....

Our other scripture passage, from the Books of Acts is also Drama-Packed. It tells the story of Barnabas speaking up for Paul who up to that point had been known as Saul....the Jewish leader that was doing everything he could to stop those who claimed to be followers of Jesus.

And now....the person who the disciples had been running away from and trying to avoid now comes to them and says....Hey Guys, guess what? I am now a Christ-Follower too...Isn't that great?

You can easily understand why the Disciples would be so skeptical and as our reading indicates fearful of Paul when he asks to join them.

But then enters Barn-A-Bas, a trusted member of the Jesus Movement who is willing to speak up for Paul.

In doing some research on Barnabas, some scholars believe that that Paul and Barnabas had may have gone to Rabbinical school together based on a few clues about his life earlier than Acts....so Barnabas and Paul may have been friends for many year.

But even if they did have a long history together, I'm guessing it wasn't easy for Barn-a-bas to put his reputation on the line like that.

What if Paul changed his mind again....Barnabas would be putting the safety of his friends and family in great jeopardy.

But for whatever reason.....reasons we don't have fully in the text.... Barnabas trusted Paul and God's calling on Paul's life.

And because of that trust....Barnabas testified to the Apostles that Paul was called to be part of the Christian movement....

This moment, this testimony and affirmation of Paul by his friend, led to multiple missionary efforts by Paul who spread the Good News about Jesus all over the Roman Empire.

If it weren't for Barnabas affirming his friend, Paul probably wouldn't have gone on to write the letters that make up most of the New Testament.

Indeed, It is important to Cherish and support those who journey with you in life.

I share these stories because I have felt that in many ways each and every one of our High School graduates have done this for me....

(Justin) Taking a leadership role and helping us to be able to have a successful houseboat trip and your great attitude and work ethic on the Gleanings Mission Trip.

(Kristina) Being the connection point that allowed our church to host and connect with the Participants of the Ever 15 Minutes education program at San Ramon Valley High School....

(Diego) Always bringing humor to all that we do and being the one who made sure we kept the important traditions of Fall Retreat going....

(Mikala) Making the tedious work of painting a church in the heat of inner-city San Diego so much fun with our conversations and stories...

These are just a few of the many things that this class....the class of 2017 have done in my life...and I cherish each and every one of you.

One final thought I'd like to share before we have the graduates come forward to share what their plans are for the Fall and a word of wisdom with us....

The experience you have had with the church does not need to end today....you do not need to take a 4 year break from the church. There are wonderful campus ministries at all of your colleges and if you need any help finding them or connecting with them, I'd be happy to help.

And when you are back in town for break---please come back and visit your church family here at San Ramon Valley UMC....worship with them....share with them all the adventures you are having.

This church loves you and they want to remind you that God loves you.

As you go from this place remember....

Do No Harm
Do Good
Stay In Love With God
Cherish Those Who Journey With You

This is what we have tried to instill in you during your time with us...

Class of 2017, Those are the words I have to share with you this morning...But...I know that you also have words to share with us...

With that in mind we have a tradition at San Ramon Valley UMC- The Graduation Sand Ceremony.

I am going to ask the graduates to come forward and introduce themselves and share a piece of wisdom that they would like to leave us with.... after which they will place sand in the container as a reminder that their influence and impact stays with us even as they leave.

Each graduate has their own color of Sand to represent them and this is a time where we take can take pleasure in seeing the beautiful piece of artwork they create together with their unique experiences, wisdom and personalities.

We keep each class' vase of Sand in our youth room to remind us of the everlasting impact they have had on us and that the church has had on them.

I want to point out that we already have sand in place for those graduates who wanted to be with us today but were out of town....Ally Kelly who in Spain Right Now with the Monte Vista Choir she will be attending Villanova University, Morgan Dowling who is at College Orientation at the University of Arkansas right now, and Sarah Schrader who is with her family in Hawaii...She will be attending UC Santa Barbara.

(Graduates Share)