

June 13th, 2021 • Celebration of Graduates • Baptism • Online Worship

“God’s Creating Spirit: Wisdom Beckons”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



Proverbs 9:1, 3b-6

Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars.

She calls from the highest places in the town: “You that are simple, turn in here!” To those without sense she says, “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.”

This morning, church, we rejoice in this celebration of our graduates of the Class of 2021. They are an amazing bunch! They’ve been through so much in the past year. Ups and downs. Highs and lows. Missing school, friends, sports, fun times of all kinds. They’ve had OK days and pretty good days, lonely days, with a few wonderful days sprinkled in.

I know, graduates! You don’t need me to remind you! So, what I do want to remind you of this morning is this—your church family that has helped raise you up and support you, your church family loves you and will continue to pray for you and gives thanks to God for who you are.

For now, as the power of COVID over our lives is shrinking, thanks be to God!, we can finally turn our attention, our thinking and our dreaming, to what comes next. Who will we be? What have we learned about ourselves and about our world in this past year that we want to carry forward? How do we hold on to what is precious, to what is needful, to what goes to the heart of life itself?

Each year at Commencement at our Claremont School of Theology, as Chair of the Board of Trustees, tradition requires that I give those graduates “a charge.” That’s an old-fashioned word, “charge,” that means to entrust them with a duty or a responsibility as they graduate. This year I said to them: the world itself has given you that charge to fulfill—to work for health, wholeness, justice, and the fullness of life for all God’s children all around the world and for the life and health of the creation itself.

That’s a pretty tall order, but one that is hopefully not a surprise to United Methodists. After all, we remember that John and Charles Wesley launched the Methodist movement on a campus. John Wesley was an Oxford don who lectured at the university. His first groups of Methodists were fellow students.

For the Wesleys, education, the gaining of knowledge, was a core piece in the formation of a person of faith. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, MIND, soul and strength” was a commandment, not an option. They insisted, in their earliest groups and still to this day, that WHAT we know is important, and that THAT we know is important, meaning that we approach this world eyes wide open, always ready and eager to learn more, to see more, to go deeper.

How essential this is in this moment, as we strive together for deeper understanding, honest empathy, with a deep conviction that together we can create more just, more humane, more equitable, more loving ways of living together with one another and with this planet.

We just have to open our minds to it. AND we have to open our hearts to it. Graduates, we, your faith family, pledge to join you in this sacred task now before us.

We heard Jocelyn read our Scripture lesson from Proverbs about the Wisdom of God. God’s Wisdom gets at the question of not just what we need to know—but rather, how we are to live as people of God. In Proverbs, Wisdom is often described as the Way, meaning a path worn by constant use. A path frequently traveled. A way of living. It was from

this understanding that the early Christians were known as the people of the Way, for this is what Jesus meant when he told us: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." This living way is the Wisdom of God.

It is through Wisdom that we are taught to pay attention to our relations with God and with one another, to seek harmony and right relationship with all. And it is through Wisdom that we attain what the Psalmist calls "the fear of the Lord", the awe of God, the gut awareness that God is the Lord of Life, the Creator of everything, the source of all goodness, beauty and truth, justice and peace, amazing grace.

Thank you, graduates, for persevering. May time and perspective heal any hurts or sorrows that you have experienced this year. May God's Creating Spirit restore and renew you now. May God's full blessings be upon you in the next chapter of your life.

As a new chapter begins, as you learn, as you grow, as your knowledge increases, may your love of God increase as well. May you live more faithfully and more passionately. May you use your knowledge and the privilege it affords to serve others and may whatever vocation or position you attain enable you to give back more generously to those still in need.

We, your church family, will continue to love you and pray for you. We will walk the Way with you. And with you now, in these days, we pledge to do better together.

May God bless us all with courage, hope, strength, and love.

AMEN