

“Remember Whose You Are”

Joshua 4:1-9

Topic: Graduating Seniors: Remembering Whose You Are Will Always Help to Find Who You Are

Today at Dublin First UMC we were originally supposed to celebrate Graduation Sunday. So, I'm going to make my sermon today about Graduation. We may not be able to do all of the activities we originally had planned, but we can still worship God and celebrate each of our Seniors today.

I remember my own graduation at Cairo High School. I was in the class of 1997. That year, we came walked down the hallway to the school football stadium and began to hear the music that is so familiar at high school graduation... Pomp and Circumstance. We walked out onto the field and... (PAUSE) a torrential downpour of rain ensued. They kept on going with the ceremony and we sat there. My Aunt Brenda shared with me later that the downpour from a nearby lady's umbrella was landing right on her head. But, she was there for me! When I took off my black robe later that evening, my white dress shirt was stained black from the dye of the robe.

In some respects, you're lucky. You'll never have to take the chance of getting soaked in the rain on your graduation evening. In other respects, you are probably in grief right now as one of those great moments of life... your high school graduation... has forever and unfortunately been taken away from you because of some of the harsh realities of life. I'm praying for you right now because you deserve to be rewarded with the crowning achievement of all of those years of hard work.

I read of several different ways that Seniors are being celebrated during these different times.

One school is having a drive-in graduation once we are able to come back. Everyone drives into a huge field and the Seniors are up front. One by one, they get out of their cars, walk across the stage, and receive their diploma. I like that idea.

Another school is promising that Seniors will be able to come back in the near future and walk across the stage at some point.

And in yet another town, Seniors are setting up their tables with memorabilia in their front yards as people drive by at a certain time without getting out of the car to honk and celebrate the Senior's achievements.

For all of these situations and for you today, the point is simple. You have accomplished a great deal in your life, and it is important to celebrate who you've become. Graduation is a chance to celebrate your milestones of life to this point. You have achieved great things and we celebrate you today, even if we cannot be together in person.

And, as important as it is to celebrate who you are, as you move forward in life, it will be even more important to stay anchored not only in who you are, but also whose you are.

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As we come into our Scripture today, Joshua was preparing for God's people to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. God stopped the water and made it possible for them to cross over. But that's not the whole story. In the midst the twelve tribes entering the Promised Land, The Lord required them to do something that would allow the people and their descendants to always remember that day.

Let's read the Scripture together:

Joshua 4:1-9 (NIV)

1 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, 2 "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, 3 and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight." 4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, 5 and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, 6 to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean? 7 tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.' 8 So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes

of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. 9 Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been ^[1] in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

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First, they paused. In v. 2, the Lord said to Joshua, “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, 3 and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.” So they stayed the night in a place and did not feel like they had to keep on going.

As I was close to graduating college, I remember a time in my life when I had two good job offers and didn’t know which one to take. I pray you find yourself in such a position one day. I did not have a peace about either job. My campus minister asked me, “Barry, have you prayed?” I had not. I went home and sat in the silence of my back porch and opened my Bible. It said, “Be still and know that I am God.”

You will enter a world that is very volatile right now. But do not fear. Just because things are momentarily difficult, do not let that distract you from where you should go and what you should do. But, don’t rush ahead too quickly. On the most recent NCIS Los Angeles last Sunday, Sam Hanna taught the young rookie, “First we look, then we leap.” So I ask you, what are you facing right now? Do you need clarity?

To find clarity, do the following. Don’t rush. Take the night and sit in God’s presence and you ask God for guidance. Wait until you have a peace about the direction you should go. As you earnestly and continually seek God, He will provide you a peace, many times in spite of your circumstances.

PAUSE

The next thing that is found in v. 2, is that they set up what we might call markers or bread crumbs so that they would never lose sight of God.

I’ve hiked a small portion of the Appalachian Trail. When I did, it was interesting because the Forestry Service has put up white rectangular marker to denote the trail. If you do not see a white marker periodically, you may be going the wrong way.

The prophet Jeremiah came a good long while after today's passage in Joshua. But the message was the same. The people had been scattered because of the Babylonian captivity, and Jeremiah spoke the words of the Lord, "Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take." Putting up those signs and markers would help them not to get lost and to always find their way back.

In today's Scripture in Joshua, God's people who were crossing the Jordan had stones. 12 huge stones that were going to last for a really long time... long enough for their children to see them.

What are your guideposts, markers, and stones to keep you on track? Have you thought about it yet? What's going to keep you close to God when you move forward and have a lot more flexibility to go where you want and when you want? I'll tell you this, it will be easy to drift... not intentionally, but sometimes to end up in a place when you look back you ask yourself, "How did I get here?"

When I was little, I remember going to our beach house at Alligator Point. It was nothing fancy, but we would get into the ocean all of the time. As I was in the ocean for some time, inevitably, I would drift. The current had taken us hundreds of feet down shore, and the easiest way back was to get out on the beach and walk back to the house. That's why boats have anchors. The anchor allows the boat to stay put even though the wind, waves, and current continually pull at it.

That's similar to the way life works. We have to be intentional about our Bible Study, prayer, and Christian friends so that we do not drift. Did you know that you are the average of the five people that you spend the most time around? That's pretty intimidating, isn't it?! Not only should it give us pause to think about the people we surround ourselves with, but also to make sure that Jesus is friend #1. That's how we put up those stones so that we can always stay where we need to be and not where life haphazardly takes us.

PAUSE

8 So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; ...And they are there to this day.

The third thing they did was they acted decisively. You know that the people had to be thinking, "Joshua, we're the second generation of people that left Egypt. When will we ever get there and when will you leave us alone?" And yet in the

midst of their long, hazardous journey, they did as God commanded. In the midst of your long, hazardous journey, will you do as God in Christ Jesus commands you?

I'd like to give you the best pieces of advice I can possibly give anyone. Life is not about always about making money. Granted, money can provide a lot, but some of the most miserable people are the ones who have the most money. It will have its ups and downs and sometimes you'll find yourself in places that you never thought you should be. The key, I believe to navigating the waters of life the best is found in doing that which will make you happy. How do you do that?

Stay close to Jesus always. Stay in love with Jesus. When I went to GA Southern, I sought out the Wesley Foundation. I know that most of our schools have excellent Wesleys right now. Also, I know that the Baptists and many other Christian organizations are great. Find the one that works for you. Most of the time, it will be an hour a week during the middle of the week and then an hour for church on Sunday mornings. Again, churches offer Sunday School classes and small groups for college aged students. In Revelation, God gets upset with the people not because they were sinners, but because they had abandoned their first love which should have been Him.

Pursue your gifting. How are you most gifted? It took me a long time, but I am now very comfortable in my own skin. I know what I'm good at and how I need others in areas in which I am not strong. That's what makes us the body of Christ as it says in 1 Corinthians 12. I also know that I cannot rely upon others for my happiness and that my self-worth is not tied up in what others think about me. I'm not a good singer, so I've got Dwain and Bravis. God has called me to be a Senior Pastor. Remember that if you are not a good singer, don't try to be a singer. Sometimes we try to do that which we aren't good at just because we think it will make us a lot of money or it will look good to others. Do that which will make you happy, and most likely the job security and the money will eventually line up for you as well. And, God's calling upon your life will always give you the most filling feeling of all.

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Seniors, congratulations. Do not let corona steal your joy. You may not be able to walk across a stage right now, but what you have accomplished is worthy of being celebrated. In fact, I hope my brothers and sisters who are watching online right now will give words of support for you in the comments right now.

I ask our members to look for ways to go above and beyond to celebrate the class of 2020 this week. Let's party in our own individuals ways as the law will allow. Be creative.

For all of us, let's stay close to Jesus always as we pursue the gifts that God has given to us. Remembering whose you are will always help you to find who you are.

As always, there are a lot of available ministries for assistance that I invite you to take hold of this week. We'll try to remind you of those in both the comments section, in the PDF text of today's sermon, and in other available mediums.

Corona is still the big story, and we thank all of those who are keeping us safe and serving so well. We're also praying for those who are affected in so many ways by the pandemic.

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Purple Cards with The Jesus Poem.

Agape Feast (similar to Holy Communion)