

Introduction to Gospel Reading & video: "A Homeless Man Walks into a Church":

Oprah Winfrey was invited to give the address to the graduates of Harvard University in 2013. And this is part of what she said:

"Even though this is the college where Facebook was born, my hope is that you will try to go out and have more face to face conversations with people you disagree with. That you'll have the courage to look them in the eye and hear their point of view and help make sure that the speed, and distance, and anonymity of our world doesn't cause us to lose our ability to stand in someone else's shoes and recognize all that we share as a people."

Jesus, long before Oprah, reminded us of the importance of seeing other people for who they are ... beloved children of God, fellow humans on the journey of life. Jesus also said that when you see a brother or sister in need and you reach out to help that person, then in essence, you are doing it to him.

This morning's gospel reading, from Matthew, is couched in a video story that strikes at the heart of Jesus' teaching .

Show video

Reflection: Graduate Recognition, June 10, 2017 Isaiah 6:1-8; 1 John 4:7-10, 19-21; Matthew 25:34-40

As we reflect on today's readings, I want to say first of all, to the graduates of 2018, congratulations on your achievements as you reach this graduation milestone. Your hard work and dedication has paid off, and you have passed one of the many road marks which are set before you in this life. But as with anything in life, the end of one season is really just the beginning of another. Now you will all begin a new season of your life ... whether it involves further study, training or employment.

Today, as a church family, we celebrate with you and offer you our support and our prayers that, in whatever direction God has placed before you, you will respond by being all that God has created you to be! You know, God has a dream for this world and for each and every one of us who live in it. God has set us on a path which He hopes we will follow. Yet, at the same time, God allows us to make our own choices and our own mistakes.

And like God, all of us have dreams for ourselves.

At one time or another, I'm sure each of you has said, "When I grow up, I want to be ..." I remember, when I was six or seven years old, I wanted to be a minister's wife ... there weren't very many female role models in ministry in

those days! Then I wanted to become a teacher ... and finally a nurse. After nursing for seven years, I felt the call of God to full-time ministry and at that point, there was no doubt of what I had to do with my life

Today, I would like to say to each of you graduates, that it doesn't matter so much what job you do, what career path you follow, how many degrees or certificates you obtain ... what matters is how you live your life in relationship with others, how you treat other people, how you show respect, kindness, & empathyhow generous you are with your time and your individual gifts and talents, using them to make the world a better place.

Never forget the lessons you learned in Sunday School – "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." And this one: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The readings for today focus on relationship ... our relationship with God who loves us abundantly and without condition... and our relationship with others. God calls us to love him by loving our brothers and sisters ... even the very least in society ...

And we love, not because we expect some reward or recognition, but in grateful response to the love God has for each of us, and after the example of Jesus, who serves as a reference point for our daily living.

This morning, I share with you a few random thoughts for living as God would have you live:

- 1. Realize that one person can make a difference.** When you see something that is unfair, or unjust, don't just complain or throw up your hands and accept things the way they are. Do what you can to change things for the better. Remember ... it's always been the individual – the ordinary person doing extraordinary things, who has made a difference in the world. It's been proven, over and over, that there is real power in what one individual can do. It's like the sentiment of a poem called The Power of One:

A second thought for living as God would have you live is this:

- 2. Help others.** Like Isaiah, like Jesus and those who followed him, we all have a calling in life. And some would say it boils down to one thing: You are here on this earth to help other people. In fact, none of us can exist very long without help from others. Remember the scripture mandate from the first letter of John? "Those who love God must also love their brothers and sisters." It reminds me of a story about heaven and hell.

One day a man said to God, "God, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like."

God showed the man two doors. Inside the first one, in the middle of the room, was a large round table with a large pot of stew. It smelled

delicious and made the man's mouth water, but the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles and though each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths. The man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. God said, "You have seen Hell."

Behind the second door, the room appeared exactly the same. There was the large round table with the large pot of wonderful stew that made the man's mouth water. The people had the same long-handled spoons, but they were well nourished and laughing and talking.

The man said, "I don't understand."

God smiled. It is simple, he said, Love only requires one skill. These people learned early on to share and feed one another; while the greedy only thought of themselves...

When we learn to help others, we live the dream God has for the world.

A third thing that will help you live God's dream for you is this:

- 3. Cultivate spirituality** – always remember that you are a precious child of God and allow God to guide you as you journey through life. Many years ago, a good friend of mine gave me a Bible and on the inside cover, she wrote these words from Proverbs which have been a guidepost for my life: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and God will make your paths straight."

We all need a moral compass to help guide us through life ... something or someone (like God's voice) which determines what our values are, and helps us to see beyond individualism, consumerism and technology to what brings true fulfillment and purpose in life. Martin Luther King Jr, standing at the pulpit of Riverside Church in New York City back in 1967 urged his listeners:

"We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must begin the shift from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'person-oriented' society. When machines and computers, profit motive, and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered." Are these not words which still need listening to, even in this day and age?

As Christian people, we are those who believe we need God, especially the God whom we see in the life of Jesus ... who calls us to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, visit the prisoner, care for the sick. And we need each other, a community of people like the church, to help us wrestle with the big questions of life and to support us along the way.

Graduates, whatever you discern God is calling you to be, may you know that we as a church family will continue to support and pray for you. We who value being part of this community, hope that you, too, will always find supportive community and God's spirit presence with you, wherever life's journey leads.

So ... live your life with integrity; have the courage to follow your best intuition; never underestimate your own importance and the power you have to do good; be compassionate; and may you see the child of God in every one you meet.

Your life is your message to the world – make sure it's inspiring!

The Power of One

**One song can spark a moment,
One flower can wake the dream.**

**One tree can start a forest,
One bird can herald spring.**

**One smile begins a friendship,
One handclasp lifts a soul.**

**One star can guide a ship at sea,
One word can frame the goal.**

**One vote can change a nation,
One sunbeam lights a room.**

**One candle wipes out darkness,
One laugh will conquer gloom.**

**One step must start each journey,
One word must start each prayer.**

**One hope will raise our spirits,
One touch can show you care.**

**One voice can speak with wisdom,
One heart can know what's true.**

**One life can make the difference,
You see, it's up to **You!****


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