

Graduations, Getting Older & Dreaming New Dreams

Joel 2:28, Romans 4:3,19 – 22

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After that I will pour out my spirit upon everyone; your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.

Joel 2:28 NRSV

What do the Sacred Teachings tell us? Father of Many Nations (Abraham) put his trust in Creator. This is what gave him good standing in the eyes of the Great Spirit.

When the Father of Many Nations (Abraham) was about one hundred winters old, he could see his body was as good as dead and the womb of the Noble Woman (Sarah) was empty. Even so, his faith did not become weak and he did not stumble from the path as he kept walking toward the Creator's promise. His trust great even stronger as he gave honor to the Great Spirit. He knew deep down in his bones that whatever Creator had promised, he had the power to do.

Romans 4:3,19-22

First Nations Version

An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament

It's that time of year. Graduations. What comes up for you when you hear that word? Think about graduation ceremonies you participated in over the years.

High School Graduation. It was long time ago.

What were some of your plans? What were some of your dreams and visions of the future?

Maybe you went to college.

Remember your college graduation. The Ceremony. A speaker

What were some of your plans? What were some of your dreams & visions of the future?

Maybe you went to graduate school and went through graduation ceremony.

Remember my seminary graduation from SFTS.

Family had gathered. Ceremony outside for some reason.

Pastors who served my home church and friends from Noe Valley. It was a full circle.

End of school, of classes, of tests, of synthesizing theology and Hebrew

On the brink of a new chapter. Excited, hopeful.

Graduation ceremonies in our lives represent endings. I like taking that trip down memory lane sometimes because I need some markers and rituals to mark time and chapters in my life.

How was the Spirit moving in me then? What has changed? What was ending? What was beginning? What new colors were emerging in my life's work of art?

I have been thinking quite a bit about graduations these days. One reason is because our younger son, Josh, is graduating from Cal State Fullerton this week. The ceremony is on Wed. We will celebrate this event at a dinner along with my sister who is flying in from Pittsburgh, my older son fly in from Philadelphia, niece and family from Newport Beach, cousins, and nephew and his family, including the newest baby in the family who is just 3 months old. Generations together in person to celebrate Josh – who he is, who he has always been. And his achievement and dreams.

I don't take this celebration for granted. So many events and losses over the past 2 years of the pandemic – missed graduations, weddings, memorial services, retirement parties. I like rituals of endings and beginnings.

Part of those moments it seems to me – moments like graduations and retirements – is they invite us to wonder what are our dreams as individuals, a community and a society. Dreams lost, dreams redefined, new dreams as young people and as adults in different seasons of our lives, and in the second half of our lives or last third and wherever we imagine ourselves.

Dreams come from a deep place in us. Joys, skills, hopes. They are shaped by external factors and from what we say – well that is just not possible. Or it is too late for that dream.

Sometimes dreams are shaped by external factors – what is going on in our family, our community, our church, our world. I have been thinking so much about the young people who are in high school and college and who had to navigate the pandemic. Such a life changing time for these students and teachers. I know from talking to young people in my life and with some of you who have children, grandchildren nieces and nephews and friends, that we are hearing how sad and mad they are. They feel they missed a significant part of the experience of high school and college. I pray for them. I pray we take time to listen to their losses and acknowledge them. But there is more.

There is joy ahead and there are challenges. Our passage from Joel offers some heart wisdom for them and us whatever our age. Earlier in this chapter -

¹²Yet even now, says the HOLY ONE, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Holy One, your God, for God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

²⁸Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

If you return, turn to God, remembering who you are, turn around and be open
With your whole heart
Not just the happy parts
But the weeping part
Fasting from whatever keeps you from connecting
Mourning honestly what is to be mourned,

Then I, God, will pour my Spirit on all people.
And you all will dream new dreams and have visions.

The prophet Joel was speaking to the people who had endured a plague infestation of locusts. It destroyed their crops, their food, their livelihood. It was a catastrophe. And they turned away from God in their loss. But the prophet Joel instructs them to be transformed, to change, to turn toward the Holy One with their whole hearts. They can experience hope when they bring who they are to the Holy One. And there will be new dreams. It is hard to see right now. But that is the promise. He seems to be saying - You may think you are too old to have visions and dreams of something good. Or you may think you are too young and your life is ruined and this catastrophe has made it impossible to have any of the dreams you imagined – small dreams, and larger dreams. No. You are not too old and not too young. Let your hearts be changed.

The universality of the gift of God's spirit on all, regardless of social status, regardless of the privilege of age, is an amazing vision. Among other things, the vision means that the traditional hierarchies of power are destroyed.

What a message to hear with our bodies, with our hearts. Some of us came to learn from Father Vincent Pizzuto yesterday. He reminded us that as people who follow the ways of Jesus, the holy source of truth does not begin with the book but with a body, Jesus, embodied. So when we come to scripture, we might first ask, what comes up for us in our bodies today? What comes up for you when you hear this passage from Joel?

High School Students who are graduating and felt like they missed out – it might take a while to see where they are since they missed a year and almost two. The passage says - Come with your weeping. God is listening. You will dream new dreams.

College students who had their college years interrupted, taken by the Covid pandemic – we know it was hard. Many felt so stressed about being isolated, or moving home or taking endless classes on line or being in quarantine. The passage says - Mourn your losses. The Source of Love is with you. Then celebrate what you did achieve. You will have visions and dream new dreams.

As we wonder about this passage, what might we tell our 18 year old selves? Or our young 20's selves if we could? That dreams change and that is okay. And the Holy One is with us now and in the midst of letting go of dreams and fashioning new ones.

And what about where we are now? Most of us in our second half of life. We are not graduating, but we have a sense of commencements, of how something shifts in us and something new may open up in our hearts. Not too old for new dreams.

Like Abraham and Sarah. I am so taken with this new translation from indigenous people. This passage from Romans, examples of who has been faithful – they use the word *trust*. Abraham and Sarah – old as dirt, old as the hills, *about one hundred winters old*. And yet they stayed on a path of trust, of openness, to trusting in the promises of Great Spirit. *He knew deep down in his bones that whatever Creator had promised*. The promise was for descendants. Impossible. And yet....Isaac is born to them. It happened in ways they could not have imagined.

In this translation, Jesus is called *Honored Chief Creator Sets Free (Jesus)*. We are set free to remember who we are – Beloved and live into the promises and dreams.

A promise of life, of relationships, of wholeness, of being at home in Divine Presence.

Whether we are 40 winters old or 80 winters old, what are our tasks and dreams now? Richard Rohr writes that in the first half of life – any age – our task is the build a strong container, our identity. Let's celebrate with the graduates who are doing that. They achieved something significant. Alleluia! A diploma, a degree. This will be part of their identity.

In the second half of life – which can start at any age – the task is to find and explore the contents the container was meant to hold. We pay attention. We work on detachment from that which blocks us from experiencing the deep unconditional love of God. We do the inner work of meaning making, do not deny our failures and flaws, and receive the gift of the True Self, the unique beloved creation that we are. Discover or renew some dreams. In this work of art of our second half of life, what are you painting now? What colors will you commence using you have not tried before? It is not too late to add blues or reds or greens. In community we can discover the dreams meant to give life. Remember Abraham and Sarah.

Graduations, retirements, endings and beginnings. We need some markers along the way help us navigate life. What if we go back to the beginning? There are many places in scripture where we are called to be Children of God. Openness, paint with all the colors, dream many dreams. Maybe we need to be reminded of those early lessons as children way back in kindergarten. I will close with one of my favorite graduation speeches was made into a book by Robert Fulghum. He offers this wisdom.

ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate-school mountain, but there in the sandpile at Sunday School. These are the things I learned:

Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat.

Flush.

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Live a balanced life—learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing
and dance and play and work every day some.

Take a nap every afternoon.

When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.

Wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: The roots go down
and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.

Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup—
they all die. So do we.

And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned—
the biggest word of all—LOOK.

And it is still true, no matter how old you are—when you go out into the world, it is best to
hold hands and stick together.

Amen.