

**“Celebrate the Graduates”**  
**John 15:26-27, 16:4-15**  
**Pentecost Sunday**  
**Air Force Academy Grad – Ben Herrick**  
**May 20, 2018 (B)**  
**Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC**

John 15:26-27 (NRSV)

<sup>26</sup> “When the Advocate<sup>[a]</sup> comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. <sup>27</sup> You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

John 16:4-15 (NRSV)

<sup>4</sup> But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.

**The Work of the Spirit**

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup> But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ <sup>6</sup> But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate<sup>[a]</sup> will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about<sup>[b]</sup> sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> about sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

<sup>12</sup> “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Today we are celebrating two things.

First, Pentecost and the work of the Holy Spirit.

And second, Ben’s work and his graduation from the Air Force Academy.

Graduations are happening all over! From pre-school to high school and college.

No matter what their age or level of education, think how far our young people have come!

They’ve learned, and grown and matured and are applying what they’ve learned.

And I think you’d agree, that no matter how old we are, we have more to learn.

We can say, God has blessed us through parents, teachers, and others so we have learned!

And, more than that, God has given us the Holy Spirit so we can learn so much more!

So, we celebrate, today, the work of the Holy Spirit!

'Cause, as I've worked on this message, it occurs to me that beyond:

- the "birthday-of-the-church celebration"
- the anniversary of the day when the followers of Jesus received the gift of the Holy Spirit...

beyond those points, Pentecost is **OUR** "graduation day!"

Imagine, if one of our kids (NOT BEN) came home one day and said, "Hey Folks, I've decided I don't need to graduate. I don't need a career. I'm thinkin' I'll just stay in school for the rest of my life. You can afford that, right?"

It's only a week after the sweetness of Mother's Day, but I can think of a few choice words Mom AND Dad could share!

And yet, many of us have sat through countless sermons and Sunday school classes and Bible studies but, *have we graduated?*

How many of us have YET to go out THERE, get the box of this building called "church," and into the world to actually DO the things we've learned, TEACH what we've been taught AND lead others as we've been led?

Now, don't get me wrong. I think learning is a life-long endeavor. Though, I do recall a couple words of *encouragement* from my dad who said, "you're not livin' here forever" – after MY graduation #(&^# years ago.

They were "inspiring" words to stop making excuses and putting things off.

Inside the "box" do we do that?

- "I don't know the Bible well enough to teach it to anyone else."
- "I couldn't go on a mission trip with the Youth, that's not my *thing*."

- “I can’t contribute my (“people’s choice here) time/money/skills to the church; I’m not ready yet. Maybe someday.”

If you’ve ever heard those words bouncing around in your head or come out of your mouth, STAND BACK! God might just be about to “torch your scalp” with a little Pentecost fire!

What are we waiting for?

As we celebrate Pentecost, we’re celebrating the fact that God looks down and could comment to Jesus, **who, we know, is sitting at His right hand,**

*“I think they’re ready! And it’s only the beginning of what they’ll do. All they need is a little push!”*

So, in our life-long endeavor to learn, remember that Jesus said, *“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things.”* (v.25-26)

The Spirit’s first work is to teach!

Can you think of a time when someone was explaining something to you, maybe the directions to somewhere...

...and you think you “get it” until they leave and you have to remember how you’re supposed to go.

Well, Jesus “gave the directions” concluding on the night He was betrayed. He was preparing His disciples for what lay ahead.

Admittedly, a lot of what he said went right over their heads. And the parts they DID understand, they didn’t know how to apply.

But, he’d told them. *“Don’t worry. I am sending the Holy Spirit not only to remind you of My words, but what they mean!”*

It’s like our walks of faith.

When we started out, we didn’t know we were “children of God...”

...or that we had “an inheritance in Heaven through Jesus.”

But, over time, the Holy Spirit has given us understanding!

And, as believers, our faith matures with experience, just like we matured from elementary school to being graduates!

Learning doesn't stop with a graduation!

Ben's going to continue his education at Harvard in a few months; he'll work to achieve his master's degree in public policy. Shucks, I need to get “fetched up” just to know what THAT even means!

Learning goes on for life!

That old adage that the more we study the more we realize we need to learn isn't just schoolbook learnin'.

It's spiritually the same for the us at any age or time in our lives!

The Holy Spirit continues to teach to us.

And like our educational studies and exams that are difficult, Jesus warned His disciples that life would not be easy.

He said, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33)

So, not only does the Holy Spirit continue to teach us, we're reminded that Jesus offers us peace THROUGH the Spirit.

That peace isn't about how easy and quiet our lives can be.

As Christians, we're attacked, by the devil and worldly things ALL THE time.

We might look for peace in “worldly ways” (to not have any cares,) but that's not going to last for long.

Jesus said the peace of the Holy Spirit is another thing to celebrate.

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* (14:27)

Our peace comes because the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to help us (still teaching) to focus on what it means to have Christ as our Savior.

And know this Dear Ones: It says, in Romans (5:1), *“Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* so, no matter what happens in our lives, or how bad things seem, the Holy Spirit assures us that our circumstances aren’t because God is angry with us.

Often we ask God to change our situation, when we aren’t even aware that God has **allowed** our situation *so that God can change US*; to grow us in learning more **about** God, and letting go of the world to hold on to Christ more firmly!

Let’s celebrate that the Holy Spirit uses the Truth: that God has accepted the sacrifice of Jesus the Savior and that we stand in God’s favor because of Christ’s work alone.

The really good news for the world, is that YOU – yes YOU, who might be saying “I can’t” or “I’m not able” or “I’m not the one” – IT’S YOU who can! The one who SHOULD – you’ve graduated over and over because you’re filled with the Holy Spirit. Our denomination’s own John Wesley alluded to the FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT often in his writings; of what our fruitful living – to teach others, to be in mission with others, to lead others to what we know – the Fruit of the Spirit are the essence of what it means to be “graduated” Christians.

Not only will our lives **be** the living example of what the Holy Spirit clarifies in our lives – that we have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – HOW ‘BOUT THOSE FOR the continuing learning process?

We ALREADY have those Fruit of the Spirit, (they’re named in Galatians 5; and thank you Rachel for making the flames of our altar décor for today.)

We HAVE those fruit of the Spirit, so don’t ask God for patience; that’s redundant! You have it! Use it!

Not only THAT, Isaiah says the source of “true authority” (which comes from the Spirit) has wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and awe of the Lord.

What an arsenal!

Paul’s writings to the Corinthians include the lists of HOW we’ve been gifted.

It’s a cornucopia of variety that some of us are teachers or preachers or missionaries or healers or prophets! What a tool box!

Paul wrote: *“All these are activated by one and the same Spirit!”*

Folks, you are so ready to GRADUATE!!!

So, Ben, we congratulate you on your achievements, not just at the Air Force Academy, but also in the work of God here at PPUMC. The kiddos thank you for fun times during VBS. We’ve been blessed by your participation in our worship services; especially when we honor our veterans. You’ve stepped in to count and carry and read and we have relied on you many times.

May you continue to learn and grow as long as you live!

And for the rest of us: may the Holy Spirit keep teaching us from The Word as long as we live!

The devil’s never very far away to tempt us to forget God’s promises.

But, the Holy Spirit will keep us focused on Christ and the victory He’s already won for us.

Last things for today: A mother was watching her son graduate high school. He was a pretty big kid and so when he crossed the makeshift, wooden stage to get his diploma, stumbled and fell he made a hole in the plank and fell through. He disappeared!

His mother was mortified. Of course she was!

But the boy’s dad, seeing how upset his wife was, leaned over and calmly said, “Don’t worry, Dear. It’s just a stage he’s going through.”

Today, Dear Family of Faith, we celebrate how far Ben has advanced in education. We celebrate how much further we are confident he will go and that the world is a better place with him in it.

We also celebrate how far the Holy Spirit has helped us grow in Christ.

So, may the next stage *we go through* remind us that we have received the Holy Spirit, the promised gift of Jesus.

Pentecost is OUR graduation day. We've received the "flaming diplomas" and can use the fruit and gifts of the Spirit to carry God's message into the world – which will be a better place because YOU are in it.

The world needs graduates like (soon-to-be, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant,) Ben Herrick....  
And God's Kingdom needs graduates like YOU.

Praise God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and the work we have before us.  
Amen.