

**Acts 2:42-47**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**John 1:14**

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

**“Corporate Co-OPERATION”****Rev. Charles Schuster****May 15, 2011**

At Iliff School of Theology they had a class that actually was one I taught, and one of the projects that the class carried out was that each student would write a paper and present it to the other students. The subject of the paper, to select a church which was the church when the church was what the church ought to be. We presented a plaque, we had representatives of that church come in, and gave them a plaque, notifying them that the Iliff School of Theology class on polity and discipline recognized that church as what the church ought to be, when the church is what it ought to be. If we were to give an award, it would be that church described in Acts, the second chapter, first century, they would have won the award. They met continually to hear the apostles teach and to share the common life, to break bread and to pray. A sense of awe was everywhere, and many signs and marvels were brought about through the Apostles, all whose faith had been drawn together held everything in common, and day by day the Lord added to their numbers, those whom God was saving.

Later today, we're going to gather our high school graduates into a huddle like a football team before kickoff, we're going to give them a piece of cake, and we're going to read some inspirational things to them, and then we're going to give them a pep talk, and we're going to send them out. We're going to give them advice to live by, things like, "Always use sunscreen." That was typical. "Be big enough to admit your mistakes, be wise enough to accept praise without acting in such a way as to be unworthy of it." "Be tall enough to rise above every lie." "Be strong enough to accept criticism and learn from it." "Be compassionate enough to forgive, humble enough to recognize the greatness in others, especially those you don't like." "Be loyal enough to stand by your friends, even when your friends are unsure about themselves," and "Be righteous enough to know there are powers greater than yourself, and a God whose power is love," and "Use sunscreen."

We'll tell them stories, like the English teacher who wrote on the board right before the end of school, "I ain't had no fun this semester." And she said to one of her students,

"Angela, what could we do to correct this?" and Angela answered, "Go get a boyfriend." To the graduates we might say, "Be careful how you correct things." Henry Ford was talking to a young man one day about his dreams, asked him what he wanted to get out of life, and he said, "I want to make a million dollars by the time I'm 35 years old." Henry Ford had him made up a pair of sunglasses with silver dollars in the lenses, took it to him and had him put it on. "I can't see anything, the dollars are blocking my view," he said. Don't lose track of your values. Don't let the dollars block your view.

Something I'd like the graduates to know is advice seen on the bumper sticker of a pickup truck this week. It said, "Tell people the truth, and they may fall for it." This is the truth, and I hope they fall for it. It begins with a story and it ends with a story, told by Dorothy Willmon. I really suspect she was in it. It's about a 14-year old girl from Cleveland who got angry with her parents and ran away to New York City. Cold and hungry and without a friend and shivering on the street corner. A cab pulls up, party-goers get out, a man in the group noticed her, asked her if she needed help. Insisted that she join the group for dinner, and she did, and after hearing her story, took her to the train station, bought her a ticket back to Cleveland, and told her, "Whatever you desire, if you want it enough, you can make it happen." Gave her twenty dollars, gave her his address and phone number on a piece of paper, and if she ever needed anything, she was to call him. She returned to her family. She thought of him often, but she lost the paper with his name and phone number.

"Whatever you desire, if you want it enough, you can make it happen" I want to tell the truth, and maybe they'll fall for it. And there are some things I want to say, and first of all, I want to say, never doubt the influence of one. Never doubt the influence of one. Claim it. Never doubt the influence of one. If it hadn't been for Moses, the Jews would still be in Egypt baking bricks, making tombs. If it hadn't been for Eve, all the Adams of the world would think God was male, and forget we were made in the image of God, male and female both. If it hadn't been for John the Baptist, the Saducees would think religion just boiled down to a lot of rules, and nobody would ever repent, and who would ever baptize Jesus in the Jordan? If it hadn't been for Mary Magdalene, Jesus probably would have died alone. If it hadn't been for Paul standing up to the Judiazers telling Gentiles they were religious too, there probably wouldn't have been a church. If it hadn't been for Rosa Parks, who said, "I'm not going to sit in the back of the bus" there probably wouldn't have been a civil rights movement. If it hadn't been for Caesar Chavez, we'd still be eating lettuce and not thinking about the people who picked it. If it hadn't been for Rachel Carson, who noticed the birds stopped singing, in *The Silent Spring*, we'd still be using DDT, wondering why the only wildlife we see is in a zoo.

It was Homer Hickam who stood as a high school student in a bright orange suit, who told John Kennedy the senator, "We ought to go to the moon," who influenced Kennedy to later, after he became president, to stand in front of Congress and say that he believed this nation ought to commit itself to going to the moon, bringing a man up to the moon and bringing a man back safely by the end of the decade, while the scientists passed out, wondering why he said it, and how it was going to happen. The influence of one. Claim it, because you have it. It's like Calvin of Calvin and Hobbes, who said, "The difference between me and the rest of the world is, happiness isn't good enough for me, I demand

euphoria." Someone is telling us the world will end next Saturday, did you know that? It's going to end next Saturday, May the 21<sup>st</sup>. James Morrow prepared an epitaph for the human race, and if it all ends next Saturday, the epitaph probably would be accurate. "In loving memory of people. 4,500,000 BC to 2011 AD, and this is what is said of us. We were better than we knew, and we never found out what we were doing here. As soon as we begin to realize the influence of one, each of us, and claim it. To see what's wrong and think it right. To ask who is responsible and know what each of us is. To fix what's broken and let alone what isn't. To step up and step out. To be the nudge that starts the motion, or the spark that starts the fire. Never doubt the influence of one.

Secondly, put words to your worry. Name it. Put words to your worry. Those whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common, so it was in the early church, everything in common. I tell the truth. Name it. Put words to your worry. Carol Richardson was right to say "Faithful action begins, always, with faithful questions." There's a story of a man who walked into a pet shop to complain. "I want to return this talking bird." "Well the guarantee on these birds is that they will talk. You've only had this bird six days. We don't guarantee *when* it will talk." "You don't understand. The bird talks. I don't like its attitude. For six days it said nothing. I said to the bird, 'Can you talk?' It said nothing. Every morning, every night, I stood in front of the cage and said, 'Can you talk?' and the bird said nothing. Finally, this morning, I lost my temper. I yelled at the bird, "You stupid bird, can you talk?" "So sir, what happened?" "That bird looked at me and said, "Yeah, I can talk. Can you fly?"

There isn't a one of us who should hesitate to name it as we see it. To name injustice, and to compare it to what is fair. To name hypocrisy, and to call the high and mighty to live to the height of their ideals, and the mighty to act out a might that is the might and power of love. To name racism and homophobia as the sin that it is, and to call every institution to be reminded of its charter. Our young people will put words to their worry, and I want them to speak out, talk. Let them tell us, if we throw everything away, that there is no "away," and we have to be careful what we toss. And if we foul the commons, we will not be pleased with what we have in common. And if we are not taking care of the earth, we are neglecting the future, and the future is all they have. It's all we all have. Debating global warming is no excuse for not looking at the earth and measuring its temperature. No rationale can justify irresponsibility when it comes to being stewards. No economic strategy can rationalize immediate gratification at the expense of long-term, devastating consequence. Wendell Berry put his words right when he named his worry, when he said, "If we want to be at peace, we will have to waste less, spend less, use less, want less, and need less." He said to the bird, "Can you talk?" and the bird said, and the birds say, and nature says, "Can you fly?" Can you fly above consumerism? Can you fly beyond waste and greed? Can you soar as a species? Can you be a human race better than you know, and can you find out what it is that you're doing here, before the end of the end?

Frederick Buechner, in his book *Yellow Leaves*, talks about a graduation ceremony. It was a private high school in New Hampshire. He was the chaplain. David Eisenhower graduated that year. His grandfather gave the commencement address, and Chaplain Beuchner was to give the prayer, and Beuchner writes, "The President and I sat on the

platform in the shade of tall elms, and about that time, a stray dog appeared, wandering up and down the aisles with his tail in the air and his nose to the ground, sniffing at people's feet, and I said to Ike, I said to the President, "I've never been to a commencement where a dog like that hasn't shown up. It's almost a part of the commencement tradition." And he agreed. And then Ike remembered a West Point commencement in which the inevitable dog showed up, but instead of rambling around aimlessly like that dog had done, he made his way up the stairs to the platform before anyone could stop him, and as the cadets were filing by, one by one, the dog took his place in line. And whomever it was who was handing out diplomas saw the dog approach. He halted the proceedings and spoke into the microphone and said, "I'm sorry, but we have to draw the line somewhere." We have to draw a line. We name it. Amos named it. Solemn assemblies, God takes no delight in them when there is injustice. Luther named it. Priesthood of all believers. Descartes named it - "I think, therefore I am." James Cone named it - liberation theology. Rosemary Ruther named it - feminist thinking. John Wesley named it - "We think and let think." You put words to your worry, you name it, and you never underestimate the influence of one. You claim it.

Finally, you aim it. You're going to see the pictures on the screen. Because nothing much happens until these words become flesh, and dwell among us. You aim it. It becomes the power of all of us, and you're going to see the pictures of the graduates, the pictures that we have. You watch them. If you want, listen to me, because I tell the truth. It's all of us. It's the power of all of us. Like the church in the first century. "All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common, and day by day, the Lord added to their number." I tell the truth. It's a good word when it becomes flesh, when it dwells among us. Aim it. The word becomes flesh. The world becomes yours. You can do it if you aim it. You can solve it if you get it together. The power of all of us, we must never forget the power of all of us. World poverty, world AIDS, pollution, epidemics, war. Problems are serious. Challenges await us. It could be a kind word at the right time to save a life that will save many lives. It could be a new thought that nobody else thought, that leads to a new way of thinking. It might be just showing up on a day when you'd rather not, but you came. You didn't want to come because you didn't feel good, but you did, and you came, you were there. Most of the great things that have been done in the world were done by people who were having a terrible day. And some of the most profound observations that have ever been made in the world were spoken by people who didn't have much to say, like Lincoln at Gettysburg, and Martin Luther King in Memphis, who had a dream. This world is changed not by extraordinary people, but by the ordinary people who rise to the occasion.

Remember that teenager from Cleveland who ran away from home? Was in New York City, cold and hungry, without a friend. And the man got out of the taxi, invited her to join his friends for dinner, gave her a meal, heard out her story, took her to the train station, bought her a ticket, gave her twenty dollars and a piece of paper. Phone number, address, name. If you ever need anything, call him. And how she lost the paper. Well, after high school that runaway went back home and to college and to medical school and became a surgeon, and married a doctor, and they have two children. 25 years later, her daughter's fourteen, needs props for a school play, old clothes, in a trunk in the attic, full

of old things and guess what? A piece of paper falls out of a diary. 25 years later, after the two met in New York, Ralph Burke received a check for \$300. "Please come and meet my family. You're like one of us. You saved my life." They met. They still talk. A man steps out of a taxi and is kind to a high-school runaway, and she becomes a surgeon who saves lives with the skill of her hand with a knife and the know-how of her craft. A man steps out of a cab and he saves a life that saves other lives. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us. The power of all of us. We aim it, claim it, name it, and aim it. The word becomes flesh. Every time we join together, with what we have in common, to change the world. It's always been that way, it was that way since creation, that way since Christmas. Always been that way.

I don't have great wisdom to offer the high school graduates, except to say, Whatever your desire, if you want it enough, you can make it happen. The influence of every one of us to claim it. Put your worry into words to name it. Let the word become flesh and dwell among us, to aim it. It will change the world, and that's the truth. Hear the names. As you're named, would you and your family please come to the front, and Megan, would you greet them as they come, and David as well. (List of graduates will have to be added later.) Let us pray.

May you always remember, this was one place in your life where we believed in you, and whatever you desire, if you want it enough, may you make it happen. Amen.