

Sixth Sunday in Easter-Senior Recognition and Confirmation at East Nidaros

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

John 15:9-17

"Fruit That Will Last" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from his Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

What do you say to a class of seniors who have finished all their requirements for graduation and are ready to begin the next chapter in their life?

What do you say to a class of confirmands who have spent the last two years of Wednesday nights during the school year learning as much as possible about the stories in the bible and what they mean for daily living?

As a congregation we congratulate you on your accomplishments and we want you to know that we will continue to care for you and pray for you as you turn the page of your life to a new chapter and to let you know that you are always welcome in this church.

Today, we can do more than give you a word of our congratulations and a gift in recognition of your accomplishments. We can turn to the gospel for today and hear what Jesus said to his disciples who had spent the last two-three years learning from him and were about to be sent out into the world to do something new.

It sounds like Jesus' disciples had fulfilled all their requirements before moving on to the next chapter in their lives. Jesus told them that he had made known to them everything that he had heard from his Father. The disciples knew everything that Jesus knew about God. The disciples were ready to order their caps and gowns and had passed Jesus' 75 question review to see what they had remembered of what he intended to teach them over the past few years. But the lives of these few people were about to change as they left the place where they had spent much time with Jesus. So, before they were turned loose, Jesus had a few more things to say to them.

Jesus told his disciples that their relationship with him was about to change. They no doubt had more to learn about Jesus, but no longer were the disciples from this point on going to be called his students or his servants. Jesus now called them his friends. Last Wednesday, as this class of confirmands prepared for their confirmation day, I told them these words that they will hear soon, "We rejoice that you now make public profession of your faith and assume greater responsibility in the life of our Christian community and its mission in the world." This group of students are all baptized members of this church, but after they are confirmed, they become confirmed members of this church which gives them a new standing in the church and new responsibilities not just in this church, but in our Christian community and around the world.

Jesus sounds like he is giving his disciples a short list of things to do before sending them as missionaries in the local community and the greater world. He tells them to abide in his love. Jesus tells them to keep his commandments as he has kept his Father's commandments. Jesus tells them that others will know the great love they will have for their neighbors when they give the ultimate sacrifice of their life for the sake of someone else. And since Jesus has taught them everything he had learned from his father, they should do everything that he had just told them to do. It sounds like from now on, the disciples will always keep God first in their lives. The disciples will never take the Lord's name in vain. Since they were taught how important keeping the Sabbath is, they will never again miss a worship service. They will always think more of their neighbor's needs before their own. They will always explain the actions of their friends and enemies in the kindest way rather than talk about them behind their backs. All you must do to be like Jesus is to learn everything that Jesus has learned from his Father.

And Jesus even makes the list of commandments easier for the disciples to remember by instead of remembering all ten commandments and their meanings, Jesus lumps them all together and calls the 10 commandments, his one commandment by loving one another as he has loved them.

I suspect that by this point in Jesus' last class with his students, they are feeling a little uncomfortable and already accused knowing that they will fail to keep even this one commandment all the time. This is exactly what the commandments are intended to do. They accuse you and remind you that you cannot by your own efforts do what is asked of them. Which leads all of us to the more important purpose of the commandments. They turn you to Jesus who when abiding in him can love as Jesus loved you. You will be able to forgive others as Jesus has forgiven you.

Before the disciples have a chance to possibly make promises they cannot keep, Jesus delivers a promise to them that cannot be broken. Jesus declares, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." Jesus reminds his disciples that they never signed up to be disciples because of their attractive qualifications. Jesus chose them just as they were. Jesus chose fishermen, tax collectors, and today chooses students who have a variety of interests.

Discipleship does not begin by you making a move to Christ. Discipleship begins with Jesus choosing you and telling you to go bear fruit that will last. It does not begin after you have proven to Jesus that you have the gift of loving your neighbor any better than anyone else. Discipleship begins with hearing a promise from Jesus' Father on the day that you were baptized hearing that you are favored by God.

After knowing that you are favored by God, you will bear fruit. Fruit that will last. It will be hard for some of us not to wonder when you are going to start bearing this fruit that will last forever. We may be the ones who will question if God might have made a mistake in calling you, if we don't see some of your good fruit. But our Heavenly Father doesn't appoint anyone to be fruit inspectors. We are all to be fruit bearers and there is no fruit that you can produce that will last longer than if the fruit you produce is your faith and you pass that lasting fruit to someone else. Jesus also doesn't set a timeline when he expects to see some fruit production, so as we send you out to bear fruit, we will trust that you will do what Jesus has called you to do when and wherever he decides.

Jesus is not worried about the disciples that he sent out that day. Jesus will pray for them. We should not be worried about our youth beginning a new chapter in their stories of faith. Our youth like the first disciples were chosen by God and through the work of the Holy Spirit, they will produce fruit, fruit that will last, when and wherever He chooses.

Blessing as you as God's chosen, Go and bear fruit. Fruit that will last. Amen