

"A Baccalaureate Message: United With Him"

Romans 6:1b

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Romans 6:1b-11

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Prayer.

Undoubtedly, the pressure has been turned up recently.

What college will you attend?

Have you thought about the risks of going into the service?

Friends of the family ask, "What are your plans?"

Parents ask, "What are you going to do with your life?"

Once you reach out and take that diploma

The place and the people

Where you have grown wonderfully comfortable

Over the past four years

Will change.

You'll need a visitor's pass from now on.

At best, you'll become learn to live with being an alumnus.

Most will walk away

And never look back.

The change is cold.

The familiar is behind

And the great unfamiliar lies ahead.

As beloved members of your family and church family

Frame the pictures with our digital cameras,

We understand all too well

Why you smile has a degree of worry

Lying just below the surface.

The question, "what are you going to do with your life?"

Has been around for some time.

Think back.

When you were young,

It sounded more innocent

"What do you want to be when you grow up?"

Late in elementary school

I wrote a report about what it takes to
become a lawyer.
In middle school
Well-meaning guidance counselors
Had me research meteorology.
By the time I aced my way through
High school science and math
I knew exactly what I wanted to
become:
A chemical engineer.
That turned out well, don't you think?

The problem is
We are asking the wrong question.

Instead of "what are you going to do
with your life?"
The better question,
The faithful question, is
"What does God want you to do with
your life?"
This is the question your church family
should be asking.
This is the question I'm asking you
As your pastor:
"What does God want you to do with
your life?"
For the question to be meaningful
It must be rooted in our belief.
For the question to be transformed
From "career" into "call"
It must be grounded in faith.

Allow me to explain
the difference between
a career
and a call.
Careers are defined
by success or failure.
Success is advancement:
More money.
More prestige.
Bigger houses.
Nicer cars.

I'm glad that works out for some
people.
But for every general
There are a thousand troops.
For every CEO
There are the masses left behind;
Struggling to get ahead
Thinking, "If only ..."
"I would have ..."
"I could have ..."
"I should have ..."
results in a lifetime of regret.
And, I'm here to tell you
Even generals and CEOs have their
trials.

A call,
however,
is all about listening.
It is about listening to
those parents, teachers, supervisors,
mentors, and guides
who are wise enough
to recognize God's gifts and talents in
your life,
who are rooted deeply enough in the
faith,
to know that the Holy Spirit is
speaking through
their words of discipline, direction, and
guidance.
A call is rooted deeply
in listening to the community
In ever increasing circles of influence.
First the call is
Affirmed by one other.
Then it is affirmed by the family or
close circle of friends.
Then it is affirmed by acceptance by
an even bigger circle:
Acceptance by a college or university,
Employment into a new position or
company,
Being lifted up by recognition or

reward.
A call is about listening to the still,
small voice of God
In the midst of a loud and noisy world.

What does God want you to do with
your life?

Another characteristic of call
Is the flexibility to change.
People get stuck in a job or career.
But when people are called by God
Some will even make the abrupt
change
To leave fishing boats and nets behind,
To faithfully follow the Lord.

Nothing has surprised me more,
As I review the trajectory of my call,
Is exactly this point.
When I was ordained to be a parish
pastor
I thought to myself,
This is it.
This is all I'll ever do
For the rest of my life.
My call started out personally,
But it had been confirmed
by progressively larger circles,
Culminating with the bishop's hand
weighing heavily upon my head.
So you can imagine my surprise
To see how my call has widened
And changed.
God had a plan for me to
Work in mental health at Clifton for
many years.
God had a plan for me to
Teach for the Mental Health
Association
And now to teach for the Alzheimer's
Association.
God's call continues to unfold
And to be revealed in my life,

And I suspect
It will be
In your life as well.

What does God want you to do with
your life?

How do I know?
Or how can I be sure?
The short answer is
You can't know.
And you'll never be sure.
Faith is not believing that you can fly.
Faith is taking the leap
Believing that God will give you wings
before you hit the ground.

Life experiences
And higher education
Do not give you new skills,
They allow you to grow your wings.
They add new tools to your toolbox.
They simply build upon the skills that
God has already given you.
If you only have a hammer in your
toolbox,
You will use a hammer for every life
challenge,
God's call will be severely limited,
And everything you attempt
will get pounded.
But if you take the time,
And employ the discipline
To add new tools to your tool chest,
You'll give the Spirit room to breath,
Room to work,
The flexibility to respond
To God's ever evolving call for your
life.

What does God want you to do with
your life?

The introspective life

Is the only life worth living.
Introspection and reflection
Is the only way we one can faithfully
listen.

Meditation and prayer

Is the only way we can evaluate our
effectiveness.

Where did we start?

What were the goals God set?

Where have we progressed?

What needs to be corrected?

Are we still on target?

Some people can do this on their own;
But not many.

Most of us need a trusted pastor,
mentor, chaplain, or spiritual director.

Otherwise we are prone to wander.

We are likely not to be truthful

Even with our self.

Most of us need a supportive faith
community.

Life is bound to batter and toss you.

It's best to navigate those
troublesome storms

With the support of friends
who share our journey.

Most of us also look to people from the
past.

For example,

John Wesley taught these three simple
rules:

Do No Harm, Do Good, and Stay in
Love with God.

That's good advice.

Do No Harm, Do Good, and Stay in
Love with God.

Our love affair with God

Began with our baptism

As Paul mentioned today in our epistle
to the Romans.

Through our baptism

We have been united in Christ's death,
Just as we will be untied with Christ in

his resurrection.

Staying in Love with God

Is all about staying alive to God in
Christ Jesus.

What does God want you to do with
your life?

Listen.

Be flexible.

Have faith.

And take the time

To maintain your spiritual well-being.

Blessings to you,

Dearly beloved graduates,

And also to you,

dear families and friends.

Amen.