

2015 Senior Recognition Sunday

This Sunday we are celebrating our graduating seniors so I thought I'd pass on some things I've learned from my graduation experience years ago.

When I was graduating from high school, I remember...excitement, anxiety, hopefulness, fear of unknown. Other kids in my class were sure of their paths in life. Some felt God calling them to attend a certain college. Others knew it was God's will for them to spend a year or two in missions. I had no such certainty about God's call or God's will for my life. I wasn't sure how you determine what God wants you to do. Prayer didn't produce a voice from God telling me what to do after graduation or what job field to go into. I couldn't open the Bible randomly and read a verse with symbolic meaning encoded in it to tell me my future. And where in the Bible does it tell me specifically that I should go to Goshen College, or EMU or Illinois State University? This was confusing for me, and the best I could do was pick the option that seemed the best to help me become who I wanted to be.

All this worrying however, is not worth it. In my experience, picking the right college doesn't always help you get a job or find the right person to marry. Doing a year of service doesn't always give you the clarity to answer life's big questions. In fact, you may find that you have more questions than before, though they may be different questions. In short, try not to agonize too much over your future. Try not to doubt yourself over your choices. Try not to worry about what to do with your life. Because it doesn't matter.

It may sound weird to say it doesn't matter. Of course it matters, Anne. Decisions I make now can affect the rest of my life! This is true. But in the big sense, your chosen path for "what to be when you grow up" does not matter.

What's important is following God. Now, 18 year-old Anne would have said, "But how do I know God's will? How do I figure out what God wants me to do with my life?" At that age, I was looking for some direct answer—a voice from the heavens

or a scripture passage that spoke directly to me. It turns out, the direct answer I was seeking *is* in fact in the Bible. Micah 6:8 poses the question, "What does the Lord require?" And then answers "To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God." These are not things to do for a living—these are ways to be. No matter where we are, or what we do for a living, or what we study, we can follow these requirements. We can be just with each other. We can be merciful in our relationships when others do wrong to us. And we can all learn to be humble before the One who created us. Just show God's love to others through whatever you do. It's kind of like that commandment about loving the Lord your God with all your heart and then loving other people as yourself.

Certainly doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God won't solve all our problems in life. Following God's requirements from this passage won't make life especially easy either. Things do not work out the way you want them to in life. When I was 18, I had a pretty easy life—good family and home, schoolwork was hard but completely manageable, and I had a couple really good friends to count on. I hadn't faced much of life's challenges yet. I knew—in my head—that things wouldn't always go well or easy. But I still expected them too. But no matter what plans we make for our lives, things will change. People will hurt you. The unexpected can get in the way of your dreams. And suddenly things aren't working out as you'd planned. But worrying about these problems won't help. The only thing we can do is trust God. Again, what is important is how we are with each other. How we love each other.

I know that some of you may be nervous about the future. It's normal to be a little afraid of the unknown. You may be doubting yourself about meeting new people and making new friends or about fitting in. Or you may be worried about the rigorous level of college classes, which can be a big change from high school.

Remember that what you accomplish is not your identity. Your value is not made up by the number of friends you have or what major you pick or how well you do in

your classes. You are important because you are a child of God . A beloved child of God. A friend of God. Chosen by God. Your identity and your self-worth should come from this fact. God created you and loves you no matter what you decide about your future.

Really accepting this identity as a child of God, a friend of God, and a chosen one of God, means also remembering that other people are too. Your neighbor, friend, enemy, stranger, person from the other side of the globe, person next door who seems different from you. All are children of God. God loves them too. Even the roommate who won't stop those annoying habits or the co-worker who just keeps doing things wrong. Or that person who disagrees with you on that really important topic you were talking about.

And if we see them (the people we don't really see eye to eye with) as a beloved child of God too, it is easier to remember God's requirements from Micah 6:8. To be just with them and merciful to them and to remember our spirit of humility in our walk with God.

Graduates, you've already been stretched and challenged to see others as children of God. Many of you travelled to rural Mississippi –to Mashulaville--and engaged with people from very different cultures than you. And you showed God's love to them. You worked with urban day care centers in Chicago last summer that tested your patience and ability to love. You've served others through making meals for Interfaith Hospitality Network or doing yardwork for members of the congregation. Though you are young, you already know how to do justice, how to love mercy, and how to walk humbly with God. You already do love one another as God has loved you.

To all of you children of God, may we all remember our own identities as God's beloved. And may we remember our neighbor's identities as God's beloved too.