

Grove Presbyterian Church
6 June, 2010

This is your graduation celebration. Congratulations. This means, literally (and if you studied Latin, you know this already), you've made the grade. Attained the degree. Taken the next step.

We're proud of you. Though more important is if you're proud of what you do.

You beam a wide galaxy of hopes.

*You won't lag behind, because you'll have the speed
You'll pass the whole gang and you'll soon take the lead
Wherever you fly, you'll be the best of the best
Wherever you go, you will top all the rest*

*Except when you don't
Because sometimes you won't*

*I'm sorry to say so
But, sadly, its true
That Bang-ups
And Hang-ups
Can happen to you*

-- Dr. Seuss, *Oh, the Places You'll Go*

All of you will be surprised. But not all of you will do it well.

You are a graduate. God bless you. A father once scolded me for spilling the beans about graduation realities.

Breakups
Breakdowns
Breakouts
Missteps
Sidesteps
Back steps
Stumble steps
Two steps forward, one step back (for the fortunate)

None of you will do it as planned.

My task today compares with our Lamaze-Birthing-Baby nurse 29 years ago who spent one session discussing possible birth defects. At the end she said that now addressing these issues, tuck them away and pull them out only if you need them.

For years I've wanted the High School guidance department to track what happens and why to the class during the first two years after graduation. Whether workforce or school, it can turn pretty ugly. Derailed, detoured, new decisions, bad decisions, dreams damaged by the decisions of others.

Changing majors

School transfers

Bombing out

Can't afford the loans, let alone added fees

Fights with roommates

Roommates more interested in getting drunk than learning (unless you're the inconsiderate and obnoxious roommate)

One roommate who got pregnant her first semester (a new spin on trimester).

Reality check: exactly how many great Danville sports stars have gone on to play professional sports?

We congratulate one Grove young man who ranks among the first Danville students attending one of our Penn State campuses to finish the year without an underage drinking citation.

Those High School A's can turn into College D's if you don't go to class or work at it. Pretty basic.

Are you going to school to get trained for a career or to become educated? Both are valid. Invalid is because you don't know what else to do. Perhaps there's merit in going back to pre World War II stats: when only 5% of adult men and 3% of adult women completed a Bachelor's Degree (as opposed to 30% for both men and women today).

Higher education use to be exactly that: equipping "capable and cultivated human beings (John Stuart Mill, 1867)." Instead now, too many Universities and Colleges have become situations for adolescents to transition into (or postpone) adulthood. The College industry can be just an alternate form of day care.

Neither are College degrees guarantees of higher income or success.

Our gift to you is an age where needs exceed resources.

A healthy national debate would discuss: 1) are too many students going to college? 2) are there too many colleges?

Want to know a secret? Adults still are making it up. Life is the art of improvisation. Adaptation. There still is much to learn. So many places to go.

The trick is to improvise well. Which is tough. It should be tough. If easy, it never is worth it.

*"Soon we must all face the choice between
what is right and what is easy."
-- Dumbledore*

The sin of easy.

This is your graduation service. But this is our Baccalaureate Service.

There are several possible origins to the baccalaureate, including several puns:

Crowned with laurel, the laurel wreath of a victor.

The best hints at the Baccalaureate coming from the word Bachelors, as in a Bachelor's Degree. Bachelor originally meant a young farmer. Dairy farm. Vaca: cow.

You've been milking your minds. You've been farming crops of knowledge.

Which is why a Baccalaureate service wasn't originally just one sermon from a pompous pastor delivering a farewell address, but many sermons delivered by those bachelors who, back when the only graduates were those going into the professional ministry, had to give their inaugural, baccalaureate sermon.

Which is what you will do. Be the sermon. Witness to the light. Especially when the months ahead disappoint or frighten.

These are precious days. The only thing ever going to come to you is nothing. These days require us to accept how the trick isn't what you get from it, but what you bring to it.

If God is a verb (my confirmation class mantra), you are the tense. How else shall God work in our lives except through what we bring to each other?

For God's sake, produce something.

What a chance you have!

Listen: John 1: 1-18