



June 3, 2007

Jeremiah 29:11-13

John 14:15-17; 16:13

“Being Noticed”

Confirmation and Graduate Recognition Sunday

Dr. Tom Walker

It is a joy for me to be with you this morning as we honor our graduates and welcome our Confirmands into the membership of Christ’s Church. I want to thank Pastor Ronni for inviting me to give the message today, and I also want to express for all of us our deep appreciation to Debb Murphy who has guided the Confirmation class through their journey this year. Debb has truly been a blessing to our young people.

As I started some weeks ago to think about this morning, I knew I wanted to share some things that would speak not just to our graduates and the Confirmation class, but hopefully to all of us. I began by reading the faith statements written by each member of our Confirmation class. I was impressed with their sincerity and depth, and I hope you will take some time to read them. Then ask yourself, “What would my own faith statement look like? What do I believe? What do I live by?”

I wish there were time today to quote from each of these statements, but I did find myself lingering over a single line in one of the statements. I kept returning to it, and I couldn’t let go of it. As I stayed with it, I realized that this one line caught hold of a fundamental need in our lives. Anna Hardison wrote it: “No one should live without being noticed.”

I want you to think about that. This need to be noticed is a continuous thread that runs all through our lives. So many of our actions each day are geared

around this one driving force: Please notice me. Pay attention. I'm here. Recognize me.

When a child is born, its earliest cries are to get attention, to be noticed. "Feed me. Change me. Hold me." This tiny infant hasn't figured out yet that there is a parent already anticipating its needs.

As we grow older the need is expressed in many different ways, but it never leaves us. How long do we spend in front of the mirror every day, combing our hair, fixing our clothes, trying to look good? And why? So we'll be presentable to the world. So we'll be noticed. We try out for the team or go for a job interview, and we hope our abilities will be noticed. We sit down to talk with a friend about a problem, and we want to be heard. Noticed. And do you remember the first time you were attracted to someone? And you wanted to get asked out? Or do the asking? I remember picking up the phone, dialing the number, then hanging up again before she answered, for fear that my words would stick in my throat. Or worse, that she wouldn't remember who I was. Even as we grow older and don't feel the need to compete any more, one of our great fears is that we'll be pushed to the edges and not noticed. Not feel useful any more.

At one level this need to be noticed is very self-centered. All of us are insecure, and we're not strong enough to go through life without being noticed, recognized, or affirmed. We need to know we're okay. So we spend lots of time trying to fit in and belong. One of the scary things, I think, about being a graduate is that it's like starting all over again. Whatever comes next—high school, college, graduate school, or starting a new job, it is all new, and it means beginning again, getting noticed, finding your niche and fitting in.

What I want to do this morning is share some things from my heart, truths that have come to me through my faith walk over the years and that have made a real difference in my life.

The first thing is this: **You have already been noticed.** Believe it, and let it settle into your heart. You have been noticed by God. Not for how good you look, or for what you can do. But God notices you and loves you simply because you are. You are God's own child, precious forever in God's eyes. No one can ever take that away from you. When this truth begins to seep into the deepest part of you, so that you never doubt it, you will be amazed at how it can change your life.

A friend of ours has been in China the past couple of weeks with her family picking up their new adoptive daughter. She has been sending us e-mails nearly

every day reporting on the progress. The little girl they are adopting is four years old and has been in an orphanage. Our friend tells us that their new daughter kept wondering why no one was adopting her. She waited and waited for a new mom and dad, but no one came along. She felt unnoticed. But finally when our friend came, the little girl ran into her arms shouting, “Mommy, Mommy!” At last she had a family. Now she was noticed. She belonged. As our friend described the moment of meeting in her e-mail, tears came to my eyes. I felt I was there, rejoicing with them.

But you know, there was something deeper going on here. This joy of mother and child is like the delight God expressed for you when you were born. You were loved long before your parents loved you. The truth—and take this into the center of your being—is that God wants you here and was filled with joy when you entered this world. The Bible tells us this over and over again: “I have called you by name. You are mine. You are my beloved child. On you my favor rests. I will guide you, every step. Wherever you go, I will be with you. Wherever you rest, I will keep watch.”

God has noticed you. And not only that. Here is the second thing: **God has given you a place in this world.** You belong. God brought you here for a reason. One of our concerns as we go through life, and certainly it hits us strongly at these turning points like graduation or moving into the next stage of life, is, what am I going to do? For some it has to do with career or a job. For others it is how to use the time I have left. All of us, I think, want our lives to matter. We want to make a difference.

Aside from the skills you have learned to prepare for a job, God has something for you to do too. God has planted gifts in each of us to be used for God. These gifts are not the same as the skills you learn. We go to school to learn how to read, to do math, to prepare for a career. But God’s gifts are there from the beginning. You don’t learn them. You can develop them, but they are given to serve God. One of our Confirmands, Hannah Braulick, wrote: “I think I have an artistic and creative side. I also believe God sent me to this earth to spread the Word through art.” This is a good example of discovering a gift and seeing how you can use it for God.

One way to recognize a spiritual gift is that it exerts an attraction upon you. It pulls you toward it. God wants you to see it, notice it; so God draws you toward this gift. Another thing about a spiritual gift is when you use it, you feel joy. You feel energy, alive inside. I don’t feel that way when I pay bills, cut the grass, or do the other chores I have to do. We all have obligations that are necessary. But

when we're using a gift, it doesn't feel like a chore at all. We don't get tired, because we're in tune with the Spirit who is our strength.

Now possibly you're thinking, "I don't know what my gifts are." Or, "I don't think I have any gifts." Be patient. God sees things in you that maybe you haven't yet discovered in yourself. When God called Moses to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt, Moses was tending sheep for his father-in-law. Moses felt inadequate, and he said to God: "Why me? I'm slow of speech. The Pharaoh won't listen to me." God said to Moses: "I will put my words in your mouth."

Sometimes you are the one God wants. There are times in life when only you will do. Don't say, "Why me?" Ask, rather, "Why not me?" Every day presents possibilities for you. In every situation you have to ask, "What can I do here? Is there something God wants me to do?" As you look back over your life, can you recall some times when you did something or said something that made a difference to someone else? Maybe you were there at the right moment in someone's life, and your presence really mattered. Never think that you don't count. God has a place for you. God has put gifts in your life and wants to use you.

Seeing more clearly how God is involved in our lives means that we have to do something else, and this is the third thing: **Clear away the clutter.** When I go on my morning walks, I often see garage doors open, and cars parked in the driveway. The cars won't fit in the garage, because the garages are filled with clutter. Not just the garden tools, but the spillover from the house, mounds of boxes and junk that just won't fit anywhere else.

We all have clutter in our lives. Desks, counters, rooms, closets, and basements. It's hard to get rid of it. We try to clean out, and it creeps back in again. Sometimes we get cluttered up inside with hurts and resentments. People say things that cut deep, and we hold onto the hurt. Bitterness festers and grows, and like an overcrowded garage where there's no room for the car, our cluttered up hearts leave no room for God's love.

We have to clear away the clutter so we can really focus on what God wants us to do. But this is hard. I find that when I've been hurt, I can't forgive this person by myself. I need God's help. One of the things I do is give this person over to God in prayer. I ask God to give this person who has hurt me whatever he or she needs today. I try to take the focus off me and concentrate on what the other person needs from God. Slowly I begin to see this person through God's eyes, not mine, and the blockage is cleared away. We need to start every day with a clean

slate. Don't let the clutter of anger or bitterness build up inside of you. This is the day the Lord has made. Cherish it as God's gift.

Finally, and this is the most important thing of all, something I want you as our Confirmands to take in, but also all of us, you are joining yourself today to Jesus. And here is the truth: **Jesus will be your friend forever.** Believe me. I don't say this lightly. Jesus will be your friend forever.

I was impressed with how many of you in the Confirmation class talked about being guided. Taylor Brown wrote: "I take my life one day at a time knowing God will guide me..." Maggie Benhart wrote: "I believe that God is going to guide me through my Christian life no matter how many wrong turns I may make."

One of the ways we are guided is through our trust in the promises of God. The Bible is filled with them. The problem is that we live in a cynical world. Promises are broken. People get betrayed. No doubt you can recall times when someone didn't keep a promise to you, times when you were lied to, or let down. So who can you trust?

I trust Jesus. One of his greatest promises is in our scripture today from John 14: "*I will give you an Advocate who will be with you forever.*" An advocate is someone who stands with us, who is for us, who is in our corner, who wants the best for us. And this Advocate, Jesus tells us, is the Spirit, Jesus himself, who will make his home in us and guide us into the truth. Another way Jesus puts this is to call us his friends. In John 15: 15, he distinguishes between servants and friends. Servants, he says, don't know what the master is doing. But because we are Jesus' friends, he will share with us the things we need to know that he has heard from the Father. You know about friends. You share. You don't keep secrets from each other. You trust each other.

You can trust Jesus with anything that is in your heart. And he will guide you. The way this works for me is that I talk with Jesus every day. I share what is in my heart; my hopes, my worries, my needs. And what I get back is not a road map. I don't know how the day will turn out. But I know he will go with me. As my Advocate, and your Advocate too, he wants the best for us. This is what hope is, trusting the future into his hands. This is what God said to Jeremiah a long time ago: "I know the plans I have for you...plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." (Jeremiah 29: 11)

When I was in the hospital a year ago recovering from open heart surgery, I faced some of the darkest days of my life. I wondered if I would ever get better. But one morning right in the middle of my darkness, I heard a whisper in my heart, and I knew it was Christ. He said simply: "I have more for you to do." I held onto that. I trusted it. It was a promise filled with power, and every day it pulled me forward. This is what hope is. It creates a vision in our hearts that pulls us forward. Jesus is our friend who is in our corner, whose promises to us, move us forward every day. Trust him. He is not finished with you yet.

Years from now you may not remember this service today. You probably won't remember much of this message. But remember this: Saying yes to Jesus is the most important decision you will ever make. He will be your friend forever. He has noticed you. He has a place for you. He will always guide you. He is your hope. There is no else you can count on like him. Hold onto that. He is the one who will be there all through your life. God bless you always in your journey of faith.