

CALLING
Randall Tremba
May 9, 2010
6th Sunday of Easter
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

This homily is especially for our high school graduates: Michael, Joe, Dion, Stephen, Charlie, Tessa, Will, and Tim. The rest of you, of course, are welcome to listen.

You graduates have at least two things in common: you are smart and each and every one of you was baptized by me. When you were just little bitty babies, I baptized your little bodies into the Body of Christ. Most of you, perhaps none of you, have no clue what that got you into. I have a feeling no one told you. Not even me.

I don't think we told you that the voice of "Jesus" in our tradition is not so much "Jesus of Nazareth" as it is the deep, eternal voice of wisdom heard in various ancient traditions: as the Tao in Confucianism, Atman in Hinduism, the Buddha in Buddhism, Sophia in Judaism and the Great Spirit in American Indian spirituality. We didn't tell you and thus you are stuck with a third grade understanding of Christianity, as a kind of fire escape from earth to a heaven out there. Many Christians get stuck in a third grade understanding of the Christian tradition. What a shame! Listen to this now with your smart 12th grade ears and see what you hear.

*Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. **John 14:23-29***

It's true you were baptized here years ago in the name of the triune God. But like most people in this society your minds and hearts got totally baptized into something else. You were baptized, which is to say *immersed*, head over heels into a secular, flattened, disenchanted, materialistic worldview and its obsession with health, education, freedom and security. In case you hadn't noticed, those are the gods of this society—unquestioned goods to which and for which we will sacrifice just about anything.

Someone needs to question such gods. Think about it: can health and long life be the highest good? What does that leave out? Can freedom as limitless choices at Walmart be the highest good? What's missing in that definition of "freedom?"

I don't have time to seriously question each of these gods this morning. I only have time for one: education.

This society prizes education as one of, if not *the* highest good. And education is great. But as great as education is, it is not nearly enough.

Educated people—in fact, *well-educated* people—brought us the recent Gulf of Mexico environmental disaster. Not just a few people but a whole collective, a community of educated people. Well-educated people brought us the Wall Street financial meltdown. Educated people flew jet liners into the twin towers. Educated people led this country into the quagmires of Vietnam and Iraq. For that matter, the leadership of Nazi Germany was well-educated and highly cultured. Education is not enough.

I say this not to disparage education. Not at all otherwise I wouldn't be wearing my doctoral gown from Princeton this morning. We need more not less educated people.

But, as my mother once said to me, education is a good thing; just don't let it go to your head.

I say this to warn you: education alone is not enough to save you or the world from destruction. It's a good start. It's necessary but it isn't sufficient. You and your parents will make tremendous financial sacrifices for your education, but they and you need to realize: education alone is not enough.

Education and virtue are not the same things. A brilliant mind with a cold, stingy, deceitful, cruel and narcissistic heart is a tragedy. You know where to go to get an education but where will you go to cultivate a heart for love, justice, kindness and humility?

In case you haven't heard, American education has a bias for materialism, that is, reality reduced to what can be seen and measured. A material explanation of reality is a good start but it is insufficient. There is more to the world than meets the eye, even science tells us that. Be careful: don't let "scientism" blind you or you will miss out on more than half of what there is to see and know.

The mythic tale of Creation at the foundation of our ancient wisdom tradition has nothing to do with the biological theory of evolution. To pit evolution against creation is silly and sophomoric. The myth of Creation simply proclaims in poetic language that the world is a good gift to be received with gratitude. *Ex nihilo* is our tradition's trademark for that. *Ex nihilo*. Out of nothing! That, by the way, is a metaphysical not a scientific assertion.

God, to put it crudely, created "just for the hell of it." Aren't we lucky to be part of it if even only for a little while? If you're paying attention you will be more than astonished. You will be *astounded!*

That's one side of the materialistic worldview. The other is the craving for material things. If you haven't yet, you will one day discover that stuff can't satisfy your heart. You cannot live on bread, cars, stocks and bonds, or iPods alone. Please, don't let the diet of consumerism starve you to death.

We live by one eternal word and I think you know what that word is. It's a word that cannot be reduced to chemistry, biology, neurology or anything in the material world. It precedes and transcends all things.

It's the word: Love.

But beware: horrible and ghastly things have been done in the name of love. Not everything called love is love anymore than everything called Christian is Christian.

It's hard to figure all this out on your own. You really need a community of wise brothers and sisters to help you from falling for lies. Look for such a community as soon as you get to college. Don't be foolish. Find good people you can trust with your life.

About one thousand years ago, a baptized child of the church, a young man from the town of Assisi in Italy, a man not much older than you, emptied his closets and chests and threw all his clothes out the window for the poor to have. It was quite a site because Frank had so many. He was child of privilege not unlike you. The world had been good to him. But just like that he turned his back on all that the world offered, gave away the shirt on his back, walked out of town naked and gave his heart to Christ. He became a student of Love.

It was his calling, a calling from the Beloved, which he answered in his own particular and peculiar way. He sang to the birds. He called the sun his brother and the moon his sister. He lived with the poor. And when he died, he was not forgotten. Today we call

him St. Francis. And in just a moment we'll sing a song attributed to him. ("Make Me a Channel of Your Peace")

We don't expect you to throw away all your clothes and walk out of town naked—but if you should, I can assure you, you'll never be forgotten. No, we don't expect or want the naked exit but we, your community of faith, will watch eagerly to see the good that comes from your calling. We can't wait to see how you love God and others—including this wild and wonderful world—wholeheartedly.

Tell us, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? (Mary Oliver)