

Graduating to Something Great
Luke 24:44-53
May 21, 2023
Ascension Sunday
Pastor John Klawiter, Preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

A graduation marks the end of something. But, a graduation also signals something new is about to happen. There will be fundamental changes that have to happen.

A headline this week caught my attention as we entire graduation season—including here at Faith where 25 graduates take their next step into the world.

It was advice from a graduation ceremony by Arthur Brooks, an author I've referenced before—he wrote a book called “Love Your Enemies.”

Brooks says most graduation advice we hear is wrong (slide of headline).

They are:

- 1) Go find a job that you love, and you'll never work a day in your life**
- 2) Go save the world**

This, I have to admit, was a bit unsettling.

He was critical of two pieces of advice that I found helpful and have probably used!

Brooks explained that expecting a job to be fun all the time will set you up to hate any job — when the work inevitably becomes difficult and not fun.

Brooks scoffed at the second: “No pressure.” To expect your day job to solve the world's myriad problems is another recipe for disappointment, he said.

He does offer two alternatives.

The first way to find work happiness is what he called “**earned success.**”

Earned Success is producing something valuable in your own life and the lives of others. Do you do your work with love and excellence? If so, you'll find more satisfaction and happiness in what you're doing.

I love this re-framing—sometimes work is hard, but if we have a path to accomplishing goals and seeing that what we do matters, that earned success—that work—will be the reward.

Secondly, it's **Service to Others**

Do your job in a way that that serves others, not just yourself.

Deeper satisfaction comes from work that makes a difference in the lives of some—we might not change the world, but will the people we come into contact with have a better day? Will you help someone that couldn't do it on their own?

It is then up to individuals to care for each other, and Brooks believes that can be done in the way you carry out your daily work:

“Service to others is loving everybody with your ordinary, sanctified work.” (slide of quote)

Sanctified work. Holy work.

What a powerful way to look at our daily tasks as being sanctified—meaningful and selfless.

It reminds me of a quote attributed to Martin Luther when describing our vocation:

When a prince sees his neighbor oppressed, he should think: That concerns me! I must protect and shield my neighbor....The same is true for shoemaker, tailor, scribe, or reader. If he is a Christian tailor, he will say: I make these clothes because God has bidden me do so, so that I can earn a living, so that I can help and serve my neighbor. When a Christian does not serve the other, God is not present; that is not Christian living.

Our work is about more than what we gain from our self-worth—it's about how does our work best serve our neighbor?

I am about to continue an adventure that I hope ends in a graduation. I will be spending 9 weeks this summer at Fort Jackson to receive further training as an Army chaplain.

One of the first things that my supervising chaplain said to me when I started almost 3 years ago was that this is a calling, not a job. If it's all about the money or the prestige, you've stopped doing it for the right reasons and it won't be fulfilling.

He's been absolutely right.

The work isn't always easy and there is a lot of sacrifice—time away from my family, learning a whole new Army language and culture, and dealing with soldiers facing painful crises.

The language of call is not strictly reserved for religious work. God calls us into many professions, volunteer positions, and family structures.

I was called to be a chaplain, called to be a pastor... but also called to teach English abroad. Called to be a husband and a father.

How has Jesus prepared us what we are called to do?

The story of the Ascension of Jesus, which happens 40 days after the resurrection, is one of the most important stories in the Bible and it doesn't even get its own Sunday.

It happened Thursday and doesn't automatically get included in the Sunday rotation.

Why is it so important?

The Ascension is graduation day for the disciples.

It's the end of the life of Jesus on the earth—no more direct instruction. No more eating fish and hanging out with their friend.

He's gone. He's ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God.

This graduation is also the signal that something VERY new is about to happen.

What is new for the disciples? I don't mean to give away too much about next week, but life is about to get CRAZY.

All of these disciples—learners—are about to become apostles, doers.

This graduation has prepared them to go into the world to teach about Jesus, to heal, to feed others, to care for the oppressed, to debate and to tell the stories that will change OUR lives.

That's quite the new thing.

Remember the advice that Brooks doesn't agree with?

If you love your job, you'll never work a day in your life... and go save the world.

Brooks is right.

The disciples aren't doing that.

This work is hard. It's challenging and it's not always met with appreciation or rewards. Most followers of Jesus will be killed for being a follower of Jesus in those first generations of Christians.

Yet they find earned success—by embracing the expectations that Jesus placed upon them, and honestly the Apostle Paul names this so well, the disciples go out into the world and they lean into their spiritual gifts.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, ⁵ and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ~Paul, I Corinthians

They do what they're called to do.

Some of the disciples are great teachers. They teach!

Some are great at taking care of others. They provide hospitality and show compassion.

Some of the disciples even speak in tongues—something quite unfamiliar to us—but it’s an essential part of the story for next week.

They provide service to others because what they’ve learned from Jesus—what they’ve witnessed with their own eyes—is a message so radical and life-giving that they know that they aren’t gonna go and save the world, but they get to tell everyone that Jesus just did it.

Jesus last words to his disciples are “Repentance and forgiveness are to proclaimed to all the nations, and see, I am sending upon you what my father promised.”

We might overthink or underestimate what we’re called to do.

Being called by Jesus to go out into this world doesn’t require you to acquire any gifts that you don’t already have.

The Holy Spirit has fully prepared us to do what we’ve been called to do.