

Let Your Heart Be Broken...

Isaiah 58: 6-12

A Reflection for the Sunday we recognize graduating high school seniors

Paul Alcorn
Bedford Presbyterian Church
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Caitlyn, we have known each other for most of your life. As I have Will and Caroline and Matt who are not able to be here this morning. Emma and Asha, we have know each other not quite that long. 4 or 5 years. Maybe 5 or 6 years. Judy, while we only met this morning I have know Christa Kuusisto, whose name is on the scholarship you were awarded, for more than 25 years. If your values and commitment mirror hers the world will indeed be a better place because of your presence in it.

We have shared time together on Sunday mornings.

And, sitting on the steps together for our Time with the Children.

And, conversations in Confirmation.

And, have talked as we worked together repairing roofs or building porches and then, later in the day, as we sat on the floor in the sanctuary of the Presbyterian Church in Grundy, VA.

I have asked you to think about that which we know and name as God.

I have challenged you to ask the next question or the right question and then to do your best to put words around what you were thinking and feeling at the time. We have wrestled with the hard question of who is our neighbor and what our responsibilities are to others. I have asked you to think and to talk about values and faith and what those look like when you do your best to live them out in the wonder and the complexity of the world as it is.

All of that.

Which brings us to today.

A couple weeks ago I was sitting at my desk thinking about this morning and about your being here and about what I might like to say to you as you prepare to graduate from high school and before you head off to college when I received an email from Janet Chisom. Three of you, at least, know Janet. On our way to Buchanan County, VA for our summer work trips, you have had dinner in her home and we have slept in the church where she is the Associate Pastor. Her email included an article about the growing number of people in Buchanan County who are chronically hungry and about the food pantries which can't keep up with the need and which are running out of food.

I know those people.

I have lived with them and worked with them and gone to church with them.

You know them, too.

After reading the article, I responded to Janet's email by writing, "My heart breaks..."

And, it did.

And, it does.

But with that email exchange I realized what I wanted to say to you today.

As you graduate from high school and take that next step towards college and beyond you will hear graduation speeches and receive cards and best wishes from friends and family congratulating you on what you have accomplished and the exciting challenges and opportunities in front of you.

But what I want to say to you is this.

A quote I read and wrote down so I would not forget.

So along with all the best wishes and congratulations and accolades being sent your way and which you rightly deserve, my humble addition is this.

“Let your heart be broken by those things which break the heart of God.” (Bob Pierce)

I am not saying I want you to walk around sad or despondent or withdrawn or overwhelmed by the complexity of the challenges we face, but I don’t want you to be complacent either.

Let your heart be broken by those things which break the heart of God.

Yes, I want you to be happy and successful and to build a life of meaning and purpose, but I also want you to look outward as well as inward.

To care for the other as much as you care for yourself.

Let your heart be broken by those things which break the heart of God.

In fact, I want to be more than happy or to be aware of where or how you find happiness.

We are told over and over again that happiness is found in things.

New clothes.

New car.

New phone.

New... You fill in the blank.

All of which is NOT true.

Happiness, instead, has something to do with meaning and purpose and making a difference and with relationships which undergird and sustain your life.

Another quote I wrote down so I would not forget is this:

“It’s not the meaning of life, but the meaning you invest in life.”

So be thoughtful about where and how you invest yourself and your time and talents and your passion and your energy.

Let your heart be broken by those things which break the heart of God.

Alongside whatever else you chose to do as a profession, do your part to make the heartbreak of God and the heartbreak of the world a bit less.

Please.

And, alongside all of that there is this.

On the calendar of the Christian year, today is Pentecost.

Along with Christmas and Easter, one of the holy days for the Christian community.

The story in the Bible goes something like this.

(If you want the official version you can read it in Acts 2.)

After Jesus was executed, his followers remained in Jerusalem trying to figure out who they were and what they were to do next. One day when they were together they experienced what felt to them like a strong wind blowing through the room where they were and they saw what appeared to be tongues of flames dancing above all their heads.

And, that moment and that experience changed their lives.

Out of that experience of wind and tongues of flames, they found the courage and the conviction to begin to do what they had seen Jesus do.

To heal.

To help.

To care for the outcast and the forgotten.

To stand up for and to be the voice for those, too often and too easily, pushed to the side.

To feed the hungry.

To welcome the stranger.

To heal the world.

To see God in all. Even in...especially in...those whom Jesus described as *the least of these*.

From the very center of their being they began to understand what the prophet Isaiah was talking about. You remember how that reading went, don't you?

*Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?*

*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

*Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and God will say, Here I am.*

*If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.*

*The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,*

*and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.*

*Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets in which to live.*

Do you see where I am going?

From the deepest and best part of who I am, this is what I wish for you.

May fire dance above your heads and burn deeply in your hearts.

May the wind of God which is about compassion and kindness and conviction and courage blow in and through your lives and then outward into the world.

In the ways you can and in the ways in which God calls you, may you repair and rebuild that which is broken in the lives of others and in the world in which we live.

And seeing clearly...

May your heart be always broken by those things which break the heart of God.