

“Lifelong Learners”

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²⁴“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! ²⁶“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.

²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.
(Matthew 10:24-31)

The father of two young children had just put them down for an afternoon nap. The house, which had been abuzz with activity, was suddenly quiet, and in that peace, the father got a little nostalgic. He began to think about all the things he had already learned in his short time as a parent. And those lessons seemed so valuable and significant that he decided he should write them down so he would not forget them. At the risk of producing a few tears, Father’s Day seems like the perfect time to share some of the deep wisdom he observed:

- 1. A king sized waterbed can fill a 2,000 square foot house with exactly 4 inches of water.*
- 2. “Play Dough” and “microwave” should never be used in the same sentence.*
- 3. The local fire department has a 5-minute response time.*
- 4. You should not throw baseballs up when the ceiling fan is on.*
- 5. If you want to use the ceiling fan as a baseball bat, you will probably have to throw the baseball up several times before you get a hit.*
- 6. A ceiling fan can hit a baseball a long way.*
- 7. Window glass (even double pane) will not stop a baseball hit by a ceiling fan.*
- 8. No matter how much Jell-O you put in a swimming pool, you still cannot walk on water.*
- 9. Pool filters do not like Jell-O.*
- 10. Super Glue is FOREVER.¹*

I was right. I see some tears out there. And it makes sense because today is a nostalgic kind of day. Father’s Day, when we celebrate the real and genuine joys of parenthood... and Graduation Sunday, when we recognize young people who have thrived and succeeded and are about to take bold new steps out into the world. And both aspects of this special day remind us of something that Albert Einstein believed deeply. “Wisdom,” he said, “is not a product of schooling, but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it.” A man of quiet but steadfast faith, Einstein was driven by an endless curiosity about God’s creation. And “*the more I learn,*” he said, “*the more I realize how much I don’t know.*” He believed that intellectual

¹ <http://www.cybersalt.org/clean-jokes/things-i-ve-learned-from-my-children>



growth, emotional growth, and spiritual growth commenced at birth and ceased at death. In other words, he was what we might call a lifelong learner.

This is what Jesus was talking about in the passage we read today from the 10th chapter of Matthew. Christ has gathered his disciples together for some final lessons before they go out to minister to “the house of Israel.” It was a class about what to do, what to take with them, which kinds of houses to stay in, how to act, and what kind of reception they should expect. The disciples were students, and that makes perfect sense because the Greek word for disciple, “*mathetes*,” literally means “one who learns.” To follow Christ is to learn from Christ. It is to be taught by Christ. He is the Teacher, we are the students.

And that learning never stops. Less than two weeks ago this very room was filled with happy preschool families who gathered to celebrate the graduation of the 4-year-old classes from LAC Preschool. The graduates were all seated here on the chancel in their little chairs, the Sea Turtle class on one side and the Dolphin class on the other. It’s kind of like the Jets and Sharks in West Side Story, only much cuter. But as wonderful as that day was, nobody in that room was thinking that this graduation meant learning was over. Any more than our graduating seniors think that, when they walk across the stage this Tuesday or Wednesday, the lessons they will learn in this life are done. As Einstein observed, we will keep on learning every minute of every day until we breathe our last breath.

And that truth is never more true than it is in the life of faith. In my experience, the moment we think we finally understand something about God, I better buckle up, because a new twist is about to come. The mysteries of God are exponentially wider and more profound physical mysteries of the universe to which Einstein dedicated his life. But no one has ever explained it better than the ancient psalmist who looked up at the expanse of the heavens, imagined the depths of the seas, and gazed into the abyss of his own mind and spirit, and was left so much in awe that all he could utter to God was that the knowledge of the cosmos “is too wonderful for me... it is so lofty I will never be able to attain it.”² When it comes to God and faith, we are destined to be lifelong learners.

And while this barely scratches the surface of what we have to learn, I want to name just three of the lifelong lessons that can be found even in this short passage of Christ’s teaching. These not only work well for our graduates, but for any disciple... anyone committed to lifelong learning from Christ. These three are more than enough for today.

The first lesson for lifelong learning and discipleship is to ***be fearless***. In this same chapter, in this same classroom experience, as Jesus prepares to send the disciples out to see and learn what loving service is all about, he did not mince words about the dangers they would encounter. “*I am sending you out like sheep among wolves,*” Jesus said. “*Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.*”³ People will contend against you. You might get arrested by governors and kings. You may get beaten and flogged. But when this happens, “*do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*”⁴ And whatever comes, Jesus says, “*Have no fear of them.*”

Easier said than done, right? Learning how to deal with fear and worry: if that is not a lifelong journey, I do not know what is. There’s a great line in the original Star Wars trilogy

² Psalm 139:6.

³ Matthew 10:16.

⁴ Matthew 10:19-20.

when Luke Skywalker emphatically says to Yoda, “I am not afraid,” to which his teacher replies even more emphatically, “Oh, you will be. You will be.” There is much to fear in this world. There is much to lose in this world. But again and again the consistent teaching of faith is that God will be with us whatever may come. The message from God’s angels is always the same: “Do not fear” because God is always present, and always at work.

The second lesson we learn from this passage is to **be genuine**. I think that is what Jesus is getting at when he teaches that “*nothing [that] is covered up... will not be uncovered, and [there is] nothing secret that will not become known... What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.*” What he is saying is that the truth is the truth, and it is always the truth. A genuine person adheres to the truth. A genuine person is authentic, honest, and connected to their true self. As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, “*Let your yes be yes, and your no be no.*”⁵ Don’t say one thing publicly and another thing behind someone’s back. Be consistent in how you live your life.

Again, this is easier said than done. We can all look back on something we may have said or done and recognize that in those moments we were not living up to our authentic selves. Learning how to be genuine and true to ourselves, this too is the work of a lifetime. There is always something new to be learned about who we are, who we are meant to be, and how to align ourselves with things that are good and true and enduring.

Last but not least, disciples are always learning about what it means to **be valued**. Two Sundays ago I was given the opportunity to preach at Davidson College Presbyterian Church, the campus church of my collegiate alma mater. It was reunion weekend and it was a joy to be back with my classmates and so many others. It was a full-circle moment for me because that same church was the site of the very first sermon I ever preached. It happened at a chapel service in the spring of my senior year, when we were all busy trying to figure out what we would do after graduation. There was a lot of pressure on our resumés, and it felt really easy to conclude that our worth, our value, was in many ways summed up on that one-page list of grades and accomplishments. Thirty-five years later, when I was given the chance to return, I felt like there was no choice but to go back to the lesson I was trying to learn all those years ago... that no matter what may happen in the future... no matter how we might fall down or get beaten up... no matter how we might give in to fear or fail to be our genuine selves... there is nothing in all of creation that can separate us from God’s love. There is nothing we can do or fail to do that will make God abandon us. Even when we have trouble valuing ourselves, God will always value us. “*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?*” Jesus said. “*Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father... Even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.*”

As I said, this is more than enough to keep us occupied. Whatever stage of life we may be in, we are all still learning how to be fearless... how to be genuine and true to our best selves... and how to accept and live into the truth that we are loved and valued by God, and there is nothing we can ever do to change that. There is so much more that God wants to teach us, but this is enough for today... enough for any disciple who is committed to being a lifelong learner. **Amen.**

⁵ Matthew 5:37.