

My least favorite question when graduating from college was “What happens next...” Even though I had an answer, there was still a lot of unknown. I knew that I was at a point on a long journey that seemed full of questions and different outcomes.

Of course, the people asking were only somewhat concerned about my answer.

Our curiosity about one another’s lives and futures is a desire for connection. We wonder how our lives intersect with one another: how are our lives, or how can they be, woven together?

One reason I love the Bible (and there are many) is the way it weaves us together. We can imagine how our lives are connected to the apostles.

Mary and Joseph are linked to David and Ruth.

Ruth, initially an outsider, is an essential participant in the life of Israel linking her to Rahab, Joshua, and Moses.

Moses, of course, brings us to the Torah and Abraham, Sarah, even Noah, Adam and Eve.

Together, these are the people of Biblical history and God’s redeeming work. They are our ancestors and we are the inheritors of their stories.

One thread in these stories is the question: what happens next.

Noah builds a large ark, gathers his family and all the animals. What happens next?

Moses leads the people out of Egypt. What happens next?

There’s a great famine in the land and Elijah defeats the prophets of foreign gods. What happens next?

In this context, it is a question of discernment:

listening for and responding to God’s ongoing work in our lives.

Listening to the Biblical narrative, we find that God leads people in all kinds of ways.

Sometimes God speaks: giving very specific direction to Noah, Moses, and Samuel.

Sometimes God is silent: Elijah discovers what's next when he stands in silence on the mountain.

Sometimes God shows up: Jacob and Joseph experience God's wisdom in dreams.

Sometimes God uses other people: when Joseph meets his brothers in Egypt, only then does he understand all that God is doing.

[I recognize these are all the men. God also speaks in all these ways to the women: Hagar, Rebecca, Ruth, and Mary.]

Attending to all these stories, we discover one purpose of scripture: to teach us how to witness God's activity in the world.

Enter Jesus. The Gospels are clear: Jesus is God's activity in the world. His life, his ways, show us how to encounter God at all times and in all places.

Each Gospel portrays Jesus praying and teaching us to pray.

In each Gospel, the Spirit is present binding Jesus to God, to us, and us to one another.

And, in each Gospel, after Jesus' death and resurrection, the church wonders:

How do we follow Christ when Christ is with us in a new way; what happens next?

Thanks to the writings of the early church we have some answers.
Paul's letters reveal the generosity and struggles of early Christian communities.

The Acts of the Apostles roots these stories in history.

And the book of Revelation imposes a dream of God's justice onto the fall of the Empire.

These stories offer comfort and wisdom for our future.

They connect us to a larger past, offering experience and testimony for Christian community.

What's next: the hope of a community bound to God's reign of mercy.

How do the earliest followers of Christ find their way?

They prayed and fasted.

They listened to their dreams and shared their lives with those they met.

They depended on God to provide for them.

They believed Jesus: that he had gone ahead of them;

that the kingdom of God was very near to them;

that if they followed him, they would come very close to God.

Today we celebrate our seniors:
those students in our lives who mark the end of an educational
journey.

In particular, we celebrate our high school seniors.

There is nothing quite like the experience of graduating high school.
Twelve years of structured schooling ranging from
the alphabet, addition and subtraction,
to annotating great works of literature, world history timelines,
and math that involves more letters than numbers.

Walking across that stage and receiving that diploma marks years of
perseverance and courage.

This is especially true of those students who march towards
completion during challenging times:

desegregation of schools, the violence of wars,
and major pandemics.

This year, the privilege of a diploma is a mark of resilience
during especially challenging times.

Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down with two of our seniors.
Of course, we talked about what was next for them.

More importantly, I wanted to know, from them,
where they had found wisdom.

The theme was family:

they knew they could count on their families
for encouragement and support.

They also knew, confidently,
that their families could handle whatever came their way.

They were witnesses of generational strength
faithfully enduring all kinds of challenges.

Then, I asked them about the Cathedral.
The word they used was *home*.
I asked them to describe *home*
and they told me about a place that is safe and welcoming.
Home is a place where you know you belong
even in the midst of change.
This is what dreams are made of:
sending our seniors out from a church they call home,
where they know they will always belong.

In a few weeks, we will celebrate Pentecost when the disciples receive
the gift of the Spirit.
The Spirit empowers the apostles to preach the Gospel of Christ.
From this moment, they are propelled into community and history:
following Jesus, bringing all kinds of people together, creating what
would become the church.
They accomplish these things because they trust that God has gone
ahead of them.
They are witnesses of God's work in their midst
and they trust God's presence in the future.
Their prayers, dreams, and the miracles they witness
assure them that God is with them.

The story of God's redeeming work in the world continues with us.
We receive the same gift of the Spirit given at Pentecost.
As disciples, we are empowered to follow Christ into our future.
We are witnesses of God's work in our midst:
offerings of holy spaces and people we call home,
where we are always safe and welcome.
We know that God has gone ahead of us
because we know that God has always been with us.
We are the inheritors of the biblical story
and the story continues with us.

So, what happens next?
We wonder about the future:
when will the pandemic truly be over;
what will church be like in the next few years;
how will we use our Cathedral space to grow
as a house of prayer for all people?

Let us put our faith in what we know is true: God is with us.
Let us invite God into our wonderings through prayer and quiet,
worship and community.
Let us be encouraged and bold:
for God has gone ahead of us
and we have all we need to become the people God made us to be.