

It was about this same time last June that I arrived at St. Andrew as your new pastor. It's hard to believe that a whole year has gone by. I remember clearly moving into our fixer upper on Chase Drive. I had no idea what I was getting into as we dove right into tearing out walls, remodeling our kitchen and replacing our floors. There was no way to predict both the challenges and the joys of the year ahead. That's what spiritual journeys are like. They are unpredictable: full of ups and downs and turns in the road that you never would have expected.

We are all on a spiritual journey, weather we are aware of it or not. God calls us all to enter into this journey through life: following him, listening to Him and using our gifts to serve Him and his people.

Today is Father's Day, so I'm going to address the father's in our midst first. Dads, I'm sure when you first became a father, you had no idea what you were getting into. There was no way to predict both the challenges and the joys that lay ahead of you. But even though the path ahead was unpredictable, the One that you travelled it with was totally reliable and predictable. It was your own heavenly Father that has guided and directed you through it all. I encourage you today to reflect back on your journey as a father and all the ways that God, the Father has guided you in your parenting. And all the ways that God has parented you and helped you to grow.

And now I want to address our graduates, Emily and Sonja. You are embarking now on a new phase of your spiritual journey, both near and

far. You are entering into uncharted territory as you now use your schooling and your God given gifts to serve God and the people placed in your path. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus journeys to many cities and synagogues, proclaiming the good news and healing people. When he sees the crowd, he has compassion for them, because they are helpless and lost, like sheep without a shepherd.

Then later in the scripture, he sends out his disciples to do the same thing: to share God's love and be a healing presence in people's lives. He uses the sheep image throughout this passage and says, "Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

That doesn't really sound very good: "I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves?" It sounds pretty dangerous and scary. Life is like that at times; it feels dangerous and scary. The "wolves" that Jesus is referring to here can be anything that threatens our safety and well-being: people that hurt us, losses, things happen that we are not expecting and not wanting. When this happens, all of a sudden we don't feel safe anymore. We don't know what's going to happen next and we get afraid and are cautious to move forward.

Jesus offers great guidance to his disciples in today's gospel and he offers that same direction to us. He says, "Be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves." So, what does THAT mean? What do you think of when you hear the word "innocent", I think of children, the

unconditional love and trust that children have naturally without having to work at it. Jesus is telling us to have the trust and unconditional love of an innocent child or a peaceful dove. At the same time, he is instructing us to be as wise as serpents. In ancient times, snakes were connected to wisdom and part of wisdom is to know when to move forward and when to move away, knowing when to open up to someone and when to protect yourself.

In verse 14, Jesus says, “¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.” There are many times that people will not welcome us or listen to us. Instead of being angry or hurt or trying to make them listen to us, Jesus says, “Shake it off” Don’t let the other person’s negativity stick to you. Jesus says, “Let your peace return to you.”

In today’s 2nd lesson from Romans, Paul also offers us excellent guidance for our journey. He says, “ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.³ And not only that, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

We rejoice in our suffering? That seems to be a contradiction, but Paul is very intentional here to say that our suffering does create endurance and our endurance creates character and character creates hope. It makes good sense if you think about it that our challenges and trails make us stronger and more resilient; they build character in us and if we can remember that when we are in the midst of suffering, we can actually rejoice, trusting that God is in the midst of it all, which gives us hope and allows us to share that hope with others.

I will close today with words of comfort and assurance from God from today's first lesson from Exodus. In this passage, the Israelites enter the wilderness of Sinai and camp in front of a mountain. Knowing that the people need encouragement, Moses goes to God and God says to him, "tell the Israelites: ⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now, obey my voice and keep my covenant, and you shall be my treasured possession."

When the people hear these words of love and encouragement from God, they all answered as one saying: "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do." They believed in God's promises, put their total trust in God and followed his directions.

In the midst of our suffering and challenges as fathers, as new graduates, and as people of faith, let us all remember these words of wisdom from Jesus, from Paul and from God: "Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." "Rejoice in your sufferings, knowing that

suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” And from God: “I will bear you up on eagles' wings and bring you to myself.⁵ Obey my voice and keep my covenant and you shall be my treasure.”

Our spiritual journeys through life are unpredictable, full of ups and downs and twists and turns, but the One who walks with us on our journey is very predictable and trustworthy. We just have to take his hand and let him lead us.

Let us pray:

Gospel

Matthew 9:35-10:8 [9-23]

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;³⁸ therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."¹ Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John;³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;⁴ Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who

betrayed him.⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans,⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near.'⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. [9 Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts,¹⁰ no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food.¹¹ Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave.¹² As you enter the house, greet it.¹³ If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.¹⁵ Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.¹⁶ "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.¹⁷ Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues;¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles.¹⁹ When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time;²⁰ for it is

not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.²¹ Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death;²² and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.]

First Reading

Exodus 19:2-8a

2 They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain.³ Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites:⁴ You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.⁵ Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine,⁶ but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."⁷ So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him.⁸ The people all answered as one:

"Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do."

Psalm

Psalm 100

1 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.² Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.³ Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.⁵ For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Second Reading

Romans 5:1-8

1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's

love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.