

“Carpe Diem. Seize the day, boys.” That is literally all I remember from my at least four page long valedictorian speech when I graduated high school. I think I made some joke about how most of my classmates were probably passing notes during English when our teacher Mrs. Schott made us watch *Dead Poets Society*, and then I gave us a little refresher of the heart and soul of the movie. Robin Williams looking at his class of young men and telling them, “Carpe Diem. Seize the day.” I’m sure I spun that into the usual, minorly cliché speech about our whole lives being ahead of us and we should use the opportunity to carpe our own diem, but I legit don’t remember anything else I said. So, if I don’t remember my own speech, I guarantee you that I don’t remember what my other three classmates who were my co-valedictorians said in theirs. Let’s face it, four speeches is a ton to sit through, especially when I’m sure most of us were spinning our wheels around the same themes, so not a lot stuck. I would bet my own mother doesn’t even remember what I said that afternoon, all I know is that I graduated, there was a speech involved, and maybe I possibly inspired one of my classmates to seize the day.

I think it’s kind of natural, honestly. All of us throughout our lives have sat through any number of commencement day speeches and I would be curious if any of us remember much of them. I mean, Madeline Albright

was the speaker at my college graduation and I don't remember anything she said. It happens every year around this time, videos will be released and go viral of speeches made by celebrities at commencement ceremonies and for those few brief moments something will stick and you'll have that moment of *I want to live like that, I want to take that in*, and then life kicks back in and that one sentence or anecdote will fade into our memory banks and at some point down the line you'll wonder, what was that thing that one person said that one graduation ceremony? Let's face it, our brains can only hold so much information and commencement speeches just might not be one of them. Yet...this morning, the hope is that our gospel is the one commencement speech that sticks.

It was something that was said in Bible study this week and it stuck with me, that our gospel lesson is like the ultimate commencement speech, and that statement is honestly, really true. We've been building to this point over the last few weeks with the gospel, Jesus going through and talking to the disciples and talking to the disciples, oh *and talking* to the disciples and we finally find ourselves here, at the end point, the last words. Here they sit in the upper room, in the waning hours before his arrest, and Jesus realizes that the time for talking is almost over, he just has a few last things he needs to get out, things they need to hear, things they need to take in and

remember. So, he halts the speeches and he sits with these men, his brothers, his friends, his partners in ministry, and he *prays* for them. He lets his words flow to God, right in front of them, so that they can hear his hopes for them, what he desperately wants them to hold onto after he is gone.

Jesus vulnerably acknowledges one of the hardest parts of what is about to happen to the disciples, they are the ones who will remain in the after. Yes, Jesus is the one who will die, Jesus is the one that will walk that horrible Passion road, but he is also the one that will be resurrected and who will ascend to God, his mission of ushering in the inbreaking of the kingdom complete. It is the disciples who will still be in the world after all of that. They are the ones who will have to walk the road of faith that winds away from the cross and the empty tomb and out into communities that need to hear the message of the gospel, even if so many will refuse it, fight it, criticize it, try to silence it, and proclaim that it's wrong. They are the ones who are going to have to figure out how to live in the world while knowing deeply that they are called to be people who live not according to the world's desires or messages, but according to the word of God. They are being called to proclaim a message of love, grace, and inclusion in a world ruled by Empire, control, and hierarchy. Jesus flat out acknowledges to God that they do not have an easy task in front of them, and he prays ardently that

God will be with them, surround them with care, surround them peace, surround them with the encouragement and the fortitude to keep fighting the good fight even when the world is resistant and hostile to them.

Jesus looks at this group of men, this mishmash of personalities and interests, this hodgepodge of regular people with all their typical, human messiness, and he prays that in the midst of the chaos to come they might find and hold onto one thing: each other. He prays for unity, for their ability to be one as Jesus is one with God. I mean this is not just your typical, let's sit around and sing Kumbaya type of unity. This is deep, spiritual connection. This is intense relationship that can withstand the weight of the world. This is a bond which cannot be broken no matter what might get thrown at them. Because let's face it, and I know I've said this a thousand times but it bears repeating, Jesus *knows* these guys. He knows how they operate, he knows their dynamics. He knows that, I don't know, Thomas and Philip drive the rest of the group crazy by asking too many questions, and that Peter and Andrew like to rag on each other like brothers do, and that John can't stand Matthew's sense of humor, and so he knows it's going to be complicated once he's gone. He knows that there are going to be hardships that arise and conflicts that occur and it's going to threaten to tear them apart, and so he prays, ardently, deeply, that the center may hold, that they

might stick together, through it all, no matter what, just as God has stuck by him through every hill and valley of his ministry, and just as God will stick by him through the events which are about to unfold.

It's deeply poignant that we get this lesson at this point in not only the calendar year, but in the church year. In terms of calendar, we're on the cusp of change, graduations, summer vacations, warmer weather. In terms of the church year, we say goodbye to the Easter season and hello to the season of Pentecost, the season of the church, the season when Jesus says to us what he says to the disciples, I am always with you, but the work is now in your hands. And it begs the question, how are we going to take in the words of Jesus' prayer this morning, because sure it was meant specifically about the disciples but that doesn't mean that it can't speak deeply and intrinsically to us as well.

Let's face it, we have come through a year that has threatened to tear us apart, that has created division and strife centered around so many things. We have debated what is church, where is church, how do we be church, how do we experience church, and those conversations haven't always been pretty, they haven't always been conversations that have dwelt on who we are as children of God, but have dwelt very hard on who we are as children of this world. We have all had those moments when we have felt like our

best selves and our absolute worst selves, and we've had those moments where we're certain we're witnessing the best of humanity and moments when we could not imagine humanity could get much worse. There have been days where we don't know how unity is even remotely possible because we can't be together. And yet...would we believe that Jesus and the disciples are any less united after Jesus returns to God? Would we believe that they aren't all still tied together even when they are significantly more than six feet apart? No...because that is the undeniable and incredible power of God's love, it unites across the distance, all sorts of distance, physical, emotional, spiritual, and every other distance in between.

In these days which are to come, these post-Easter days, these season of the church days, these hopefully post-pandemic days, we have to ask ourselves who we want to be as a community, as a people tasked with being the hands and feet of God in the world, as a family of God who has striven to remain united through a year of unbelievable pain and chaos. Do we want to be people who are defined by worldly things? Things like selfish individualism, greed, animosity, and an unwillingness to listen to our siblings. Things like hatred and violence and raised voices and fists. Things like threatening to take our ball and go home because the world hasn't spun the way we wanted that day. Or do we want to be defined by who we are as

children of God, as a family of God, as people knit together by the waters of baptism and by the body and blood of our Savior who literally died for us so that we might know how much we are loved and share that love for one another. Defined by things such as grace, which says I love you even when the world screams hatred. Defined by things such as unrelenting acceptance, which says I see you for who you are even when the world turns a blind eye. Defined by things such as unabashed hope which says that this world, this life was created for good even when the world tells us otherwise.

Not to sound too much like a rose-colored glasses commencement day speaker, but this is meant to be our time. Our time to live into the mission and call of the gospel, to be people of love, people of hope, people of unity, who rise above the petty calls of the world and dare to do something different. I mean let's be real, there's a reason that the "Carpe Diem" scene of *Dead Poets Society* resonates across the decades with so many people. Because each of us knows that calling, that desire to seize the day and make it count. And maybe today, on this last Sunday of Easter, that is what Jesus is calling us to too, to seize the gospel, to seize the opportunities in front of us to be people of love, hope, and grace. It's up to us what we do with what has been handed over to us: the gospel and kingdom of our Lord. But maybe there's only one thing to do: Carpe Diem. Seize the day. **AMEN!!!**