

June 3, 2018 – Youth Sunday

TITLE: Charge to the Seniors

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Some of the best advice I've received, I learned in High School.

- Never drive more than 5 miles over the speed limit
- When you interview for a job and someone asks if you can do something, say "yes." Your answer will be true if you already know how and also if you are confident you can learn how. Be willing to learn.
- Never insult a friend's parent—even if your friend is complaining about them.
- Ask questions—the more you ask, the more you learn.
- Always start each paragraph with a thesis statement.
- Don't be who someone else thinks you should be. Be true to yourself. Be yourself.
- Be kind to everyone—especially those who are being left out.
- Don't fill your brain with information you can look up. Fill your brain with pathways to information. Know how to think. Train yourself to figure things out.

Frankly, all of this advice still sticks with me today. I always use a thesis statement, never drive more than 5 mph over the speed limit (at least not on purpose), and I try to be kind. I try to figure things out, to solve problems, to access information. And I believe that asking questions is a mark of courage, not ignorance. These tidbits of advice have helped shape me. They've helped me become who I am and who I continue to become. They've been gifts.

So as I gift, I wanted to offer you a few pieces of advice, in the hopes that the words you hear will still be a part of who you are decades later.

The advice I have to offer is not advice that I have made up. I've learned, this, too, over the years. It's foundational advice for living offered not just to teenagers bracing for life's next best adventure, but is advice that all of us might do well to heed. Since I'm a pastor, it should come as no surprise that it comes from scripture. The Bible has a lot of wisdom, which, if understood properly, can guide us, strengthen us, and build community. But there are two kernels of wisdom that I want to lift up to you today.

My first piece of advice is this: *Love God with your whole heart, mind, soul and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself.* When Jesus was asked for the greatest commandment, this was his answer. He said that all of the law and the prophets hinged on this principle. If there was one piece of advice that Jesus would leave you with today, I have a hunch it would be this. *Love. Love God. Love others. Love yourself.* Do all things in love. Direct love upward, outward and inward. Send love everywhere. Let love inform you, guide you, fill you, comfort you, heal you, motivate you, transform you.

We live in a world that seems overrun with hate. It is as if people are letting every prejudice or every harmful thought hang out there for the world to see. There is an upsurge in violence, and systemic and personal attacks against others based on race,

ethnicity, gender, sexual identity. Every drop of love you have to offer will make a difference. Every drop of love you extend helps to heal our wounded world. Every drop of love that you share bears witness to the power of a loving God who made us, redeems us and sustains us. Every act of praise, compassion or hope is an act that breathes new life into the world. So love: the God who made you, the stranger, the friend and even the enemy. And love yourself. You're worth it.

My second piece of advice is this: Let your light shine. It sounds hokey, I know. But it's in the Bible too—part of Jesus' address to the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount. And for you, too, I stress its importance. Don't hide your gifts, don't stifle your potential, don't shy away from being you. Let your light shine before all so that through you others might see God at work in this world.

As you read in Psalm 139—you each are made by God, uniquely gifted, wholly loved. And our faith assures us that you have been fearfully and wonderfully made. You possess many gifts—appointed by God and to be shared with the world.

I've seen it in your proficiency for leadership, your sense of justice, your talents for music, for working with children, for crossing cultural lines. I've seen it in your extension of compassion, your wisdom, your humor, your hard work, your kindness, your sense of responsibility, and the way in which you look out for your friends.

I've seen it at work since you were all small children—even shorter than me. I know that you each not only possess many gifts, but that you *are* a gift—to your families, to this church, to the world.

So go forth and be YOU. Be every awesome part of yourself that rises up in the face of injustice, that speaks up for those in need, that creates beautiful art, that shows a child they are valued, that collaborates with a teacher or neighbor or peer to bring an idea to life. Be you.

You truly are fearfully and wonderfully made.

And as you step out on the next adventure of your lives, I know that you truly will make a difference. In fact, you already have. Thanks be to God.