

2015 Deer Lakes Baccalaureate Sermon (adapted)

***“God Goes With You!”***

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Texts: Joshua 1:5-9  
Jeremiah 29:11  
Matthew 28:16-20

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This morning we celebrate our graduates, who have reached a milestone. It's important that we honor and bless them as they step into the future. I will address my sermon primarily to them this morning, but you all can listen in. We all have next steps in our journey with God. We all can hear God's word of encouragement this day.

You can tell from the gray in my beard that it's been a few years since my own graduation from high school! Unfortunately, it's been a few years since I graduated from seminary! But I still remember those times of transition...the excitement, the relief, the anticipation of what is to come, the apprehension, the feeling that it is the end of something, but the hope that there are big things to come.

With so many emotions, so many thoughts, so much going on for you, it is easy to lose your bearings, to feel like you are lost. No matter what your plans are for the coming years, or even if you don't have firm plans, the whole world lies before you, a world full of opportunities and technological advances. I want to remind you that God goes with you. I know it's easy to forget that or to think that it doesn't matter, that maybe you don't need God now that you seem to be all grown up! But consider this:

There was this group of very capable scientists who were discussing which one of them was going to go to God and explain that they didn't need him anymore. One of the scientists finally volunteered and went to tell God the news that he was no longer needed. The scientist says to God —

“God, you know, a bunch of us have been thinking and I've come to tell you that we really don't need you anymore. I mean, we've been coming up with great theories and ideas, we've cloned sheep, and we're on the verge of cloning humans. We have i-Phones, i-Pads, even i-Watches. Heck, we have Siri! So, as you can see, we really don't need you.” God nods understandingly and says “I see. Well, no hard feelings. But before you go let's have a contest. What do you think?” The scientist says, “Sure. What kind of contest?” God suggests: “A person-making contest.” The scientist eagerly replies: “Sure! No problem.”

The scientist bends down, scoops up some dirt and says, “Okay, I'm ready!” God replies, “No, no, no ... You'll have to get your own dirt.”

Some of you will take interesting paths in the coming months and years, some will choose well-worn paths, some will take the road-less-traveled, some will go off the beaten path. But remember, whatever dirt you trod...it's God's dirt! Wherever you go, God goes with you...and God has been there before.

I want to encourage you to hold on to your faith, rely on it, lean on it. Know that it is natural to feel inadequate, normal to have apprehension, ordinary to be unsure of yourself. Even Joshua, the great leader of Israel in the Old Testament, was hesitant when faced with the next step. He was chosen by God to succeed Moses – who had famously led Israel out of Egypt, out of the clutches of Pharaoh, across the Red Sea and through many trials and 40 years in the wilderness. How could Joshua measure up? How could he accomplish what his predecessor did? What if he failed?

God hears our questions. God heard Joshua. And God encouraged him: *Be strong and of good courage, be not frightened, neither be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.*

Things looked pretty bleak centuries later when Israel was in shambles and the Prophet Jeremiah had just about given up hope. And God encouraged him: *I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future with hope.*

Jesus encouraged his disciples in the same way – Before leaving them, he told them what he expected of them – they were to carry the good news of the Gospel with them to the ends of the earth. And what did he say last? *And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

When we go as God's people, when you understand yourself as a disciple, an agent, God's own person, then it's nice to know "God goes with you."

I know you have places to go and people to see. You will be driving all over to some familiar hangouts, but eventually to new and strange destinations. If you are fortunate you have the advantage of a GPS unit.

Having one of these units at your disposal sort of makes maps, mapquest, written directions, and road signs obsolete. You need only punch in the address of your destination and then drive. Follow the voice -- turn when the voice says turn. It's tough to get lost.

The marvelous thing about GPS is that even when you make a wrong turn, a bone-headed, inexcusable, silly wrong turn, what does the GPS do? It recalibrates – it says, OK, we are changing our route now and we will get back on the right track. And if you have ears to hear and you follow the directions – you can still get to where you are going. It's a beautiful thing.

This is a perfect metaphor for life with God! GPS – think of it as God's Positioning System! As you are driving through life – you are always on roads that God knows, always treading on dirt that is familiar to God...after all, it's God's dirt. And God goes with you. Even if you don't listen to God for awhile, or forget to turn where you know you should, you cannot get so lost that God will not direct you back. God is endlessly creative in recalibrating journeys.

God loves you. God wants you to make it. God intends well-being for you. God will provide you with opportunities, if you will only have eyes to see and ears to hear. God lifts us up when we are down. God makes a way for us, even when there seems to be no way.

If you only remember one thing from this morning, as your graduation begins to fade into the past and you continue your journey, remember that God goes with you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.