

The Sunnybrook Pulpit

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First Things First

Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live justly,
and he will give you everything you need. – *Matthew 6:25-34*

I want to make a simple demonstration here this morning. I have filled this glass vase with stones. It looks pretty full, but in fact there is lots of room between all those stones for sand to pour in. But if I put the sand in first, there is no way I could get all the stones in.

Now this is your life. The stones are the important things in life, the big questions, your core values: What kind of person will you be? What or who will you serve with your life? When push comes to shove, what is really most important to you?

Jesus taught us that the most important things are loving God and loving neighbour, so these rocks represent those things, and particularly the neighbours God has given you special charge of: yourself and your health, your family, your close lifetime friends, eventually a life partner, children and even grandchildren - all the things that we really live for and if everything else was lost, and only these remained, your life would still be full.

The sand represents the little things that we sometimes confuse with the big things: our money, our possessions, our salary, our status in the community. If you put the sand in the vase first, there is no room for the stones. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have time or energy for the things that really matter.

Throughout our lives changing circumstances keep raising the big questions, keep challenging our core values, keep requiring us to rethink what our lives are about and who and what we serve. It doesn't help that we live in a society in which we are constantly surrounded by advertising that tempts us with small things and makes them sound like big things: a new car will give you freedom and sex appeal, for example. So sometimes we all find that we have got things mixed around, and that the things we thought were important weren't as important as we thought they were. Then to get things

back on track can be quite stressful and wrenching. Sometimes we gain wisdom only through painful experience.

But there are other ways to gain wisdom about what is really important. Wisdom about what is big and what is little is an important part of what we call spirituality, and why your parents thought it was an important part of your family life to be a part of a spiritual community.

In order to keep growing in wisdom, it is important to find ways to keep your priorities clear, to find a community that can support you as you consider the big questions, and surround yourself with people whom you admire and ideas which challenge you to become the best that you can possibly be.

When Jesus said “Seek first the kingdom of God” I think he was inviting us to get our priorities straight by setting our lives in the largest possible context. God’s kingdom is when God is the ruler: not the hunger for power or wealth or self-centred desires. God rules in our lives, when we do what God wants us to, and be the people whom God wants us to be. What God wants for us are the really important things in life: justice, freedom, joy, peace, compassion, generosity, loyalty and love. Seek God’s will first, get the important things in the right priority, and all these things will be yours as well, the small stuff will follow.

That doesn’t mean that your life will always be smooth sailing, only that it will be worth living.

You graduates are at a point in your lives when you are making huge choices, momentous decisions. You are deciding what education and vocation to pursue. Within a few years, you may be committing to a life partner, having children, making big financial decisions. Those are all big decisions. But the biggest one of all is what your ultimate goal in life is, what your life is devoted to. If you devote yourself to something that isn’t worth of your best efforts, eventually you will be disappointed. So I urge you to dedicate yourself to that ultimate source of all things that we call God, because in giving our lives to the All, we discover that all the rest will fall into place.

But this question of what we are devoted to is a question for us all, of whatever age, children, teens, adults and seniors because it is something we have to keep asking ourselves and recommitting to at each stage in our journey. It is comforting to know that

when we earnestly seek the good, with pure hearts, then even our worst mistakes have a way of being used by God for good purposes.

You graduates, as you go on to the next stage of your lives, as you scatter from this church and this town and pursue your dreams, it is my prayer that you will resist the constant temptation to think small and dream small, that you will keep asking the big questions, the important questions, the questions about who you are and whom God wants you to be.

When we do that, we discover that we are, in the words of this next hymn, part of a greater chorus, a song of praise which echoes through the whole creation. We are part of something much bigger than ourselves, joined to the birds and the whales, oceans and the winds, a chorus of all creation, in which all things are connected, and all in harmony.