

Grace, mercy & peace from God our Father & our Lord Jesus Christ

As you might imagine, *graduations have loomed large* in my world recently. Keoni, Hannah and Deb have graduated, and last week was devoted to attending Sophia's college graduation from UCSC.

Ironically, at a time when celebrating accomplishment would seem to be the order of the day, *something else lurks just under the surface*. Sophia told me that she's been having *those frightening test dreams*. You know the ones; you discover that *you have a test you didn't know about, didn't study for, don't know where the test is*, or my personal favorite – the dream where *it's finals weeks and you discover that you're enrolled in a class you haven't attended*, but now have to take an exam for.

Sara recounted Sophia's dreams *to our dentist*, who recalled his own summer after graduation from college. He said that even though he already knew he was going to dental school *he was plagued by those same fearful dreams*.

It seems ironic that at a milestone like graduation, fear would occupy our thoughts. But *a certain amount of fear makes sense when a person moves from an established pattern of life* – like attending classes for years – to facing the uncertainty of the future.

This is where the disciples find themselves in the gospel this morning. They have been following Jesus around for some time as learners, while Jesus teaches and handles most of the complications that arise.

Now, as you heard last Sunday, *Jesus tells them He's sending them out* to the surrounding towns and villages in pairs to face things and situations that Jesus has took care of before. *This is why Jesus reassures his disciples this morning, telling them not to be afraid of the uncertainty ahead because of the certainty that God cares for them.*

Despite the *unprecedented safety of our modern lives fear and anxiety continue to confound us*, confuse us, and occasionally paralyze us. And admittedly – at least in my life – fear and anxiety *weaken our ability*. Fear isolates us, *making us feel that everything depends on our every decision and action, and that any mistake will lead to disastrous consequences.*

How do you deal with this sort of fear in your life?

For me, I deal with fear and anxiety by *reminding myself that whatever I am facing, I do not face alone*. In this regard, memories of my failures and hardships in the past inform my anxiety and fear and reassure me. *At the worst points in my life, facing what I was certain would be my undoing, I discovered, time and again, that I was not alone, and indeed, did not face whatever I feared alone*. Facing disastrous grades, nervous breakdowns, adversarial people, even the death of my child has taught me over and over again that I am held and upheld – *sometimes by friends, sometimes by unknown neighbors, sometimes by prayer – always by the God who cares about me as even God cares about the smallest sparrow.*

Jesus seeks to remind us of this morning. *Do not be afraid of uncertainty for you do not face life alone*. Rather, even in the most

appalling circumstances the Father accompanies you, & has your back.

As always, **Jesus lives what He teaches**. Facing the uncertainty of what will happen when He enters Jerusalem, Jesus goes anyway; facing the certainty of judgment and suffering Jesus freely surrenders Himself to the Temple guard on the Mount of Olives; facing pain, ridicule, abandonment by those closest to Him, Jesus does not intervene in the kangaroo court that condemns Him. Finally, facing crucifixion and death itself, Jesus allows the worst of human hatred, violence, and bitterness to do its worst as He goes to the cross. Death is the final threat – a threat which Jesus embraces through trust in His Father. *All this He does trusting that He is not alone and belongs to the Father.*

As one scholar noted: *Crucifixion was not used on Roman citizens, but "for sociopolitical marginals such as 'rebellious' foreigners"*. The cross was a means of dividing citizen from non-citizen, the socially acceptable from the rejected.

Jesus' words as He sends His disciples out – including all of us here – encourage us to choose the difficult path rejected by the world. Jesus bids us to identify with the nobodies like slaves, and with those the world condemns as cursed by God. Jesus would have us identify with those who resist the power of worldly empire's, who contest its version of reality, and who are vulnerable to its reprisals. *Jesus calls us to identify with a sign of the empire's violent and humiliating attempt to dispose of those who threatened or challenged its interests – the cross.*

We display crosses, worship beneath crosses, wear crosses on our body –

even tattoo crosses into our flesh – not because we endorse brutal form of execution it represents, but because through His passion Jesus reframes the power of our greatest fear.

The reigning powers of the world do their worst in crucifying Jesus, yet the Father and Spirit raise Jesus from death, thwarting the power of hatred, violence, even death. And the Father and Spirit raise Jesus to establish God's reign over all things.

As Matthew's gospel and Jesus' resurrection demonstrate, the *cross no longer represents the ultimate power of the world and our fears. Instead, it reminds us that even when we face our worst fear – God is with us.* In light of Jesus' resurrection, *the cross now stands as a sign that ironically indicates the limits of and what assails us and the friendship of the God whose power dwarfs what we fear most.*

Jesus does not suggest that bad things will not happen to us. Indeed, in this gospel reading and last weeks, He seems to suggest that we should count on bad things happening, but nevertheless, trust all the more that we do not face life, the world, or our fears alone.

To be worthy of Jesus is live each day and circumstance boldly trusting that God will never abandon us even if our worst fears are realized, and *all the while proclaiming and demonstrating to our neighbor and the world that we, they, none of us face life or death alone.*

Amen!!!