

COMMENCEMENT DAY

What We Have Learned

John 17:20-26

Created by *Dale Ohmart*

Big Idea: *During our time at Northview Elementary, we have learned lessons that will be essential as we work to build our ministry in the months and years to come.*

Let's take a moment as we begin our service today to observe that tomorrow has been designated as MEMORIAL DAY, reserved to remember the soldiers who have given their lives in the service of our nation. You will probably agree that the profound meaning of this day has diminished somewhat over the past several years...now, most of us simply use it as an opportunity to take a three-day weekend to kick-off the summer with a trip or a cookout. But there is a serious effort underway to restore the significance of Memorial Day in the collective mind of our culture. On May 3, 2000 President Clinton released a memo to all agencies of the federal government promoting a "National Moment of Remembrance," suggesting that Americans everywhere set aside 3:00 pm on Memorial Day "to pause for one minute...to remember and reflect on the sacrifices made by so many to provide freedom for all." All Americans who do this are certainly taking a step in the right direction, and I hope you will join me in setting that time aside tomorrow for a prayer of thanksgiving in memory of those who have fallen and to also pray for those soldiers who are even now serving. But let's also take a moment in our worship right now. Today we will observe Memorial Day by listening to John McCrae's poem, *In Flanders Fields*, written in 1915 during World War I, and the reply it inspired by Moina Michael. Following the reading, we will have a few moments of silence to reflect, to remember and to pray. Please stand now...

READING – Tim & Deb McClure

In Flanders Fields

John McCrae, 1915.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Reply by Moina Michael...
We cherish too, the Poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led,
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies.

Whether you realize it or not, today is the favorite day on the calendar of every school-age child in America. The last day in school. We have been highlighting it for weeks. Just like the fifth graders that finished this past week at here at Northview and the eighth graders that finished at New Mark, we are moving into a new chapter of our development as a congregation.

So the focus of our thinking this morning is this moment of passage. We are closing a chapter in our existence, but not before we take a moment to think about the lessons we have learned during the past four years we have spent here. These important lessons will continue to shape us as we serve God and our community in the years ahead. And I'll give you a bit of advance notice right now...we will take a moment later in the service to allow you to share a moment that you will never forget from our Northview days.

PRAYER – *Almighty God, we have come together to praise you. This past week has been a time for celebrating academic achievement. And as we do, may we remember that you are the author and keeper of all truth and all knowledge. Though we may experience the joy of discovery and accomplishment, remind us that there is still so much to learn. Teach us a little more about the magnitude of your grace and the power of your love. Lead us today as we explore the faith you want us to have and the purpose you want us to serve. Thank you for the mercy, the joy and the peace you give us. And receive the sacrifice of praise we now offer in your honor...*

SONGS

- *Better Than Life*
- *Take My Life (Holiness...)*
- *O Lord, You're Beautiful*

COMMUNION – *Steve Kilson*

PRESENTATION

According to a coach I had during my high school years, everybody can't wait to be something else. When you were twelve, you couldn't wait until you were fifteen and a half so you could drive a car. When you were fifteen and a half, you couldn't wait until you were sixteen so you could drive the car without your parents. When you were sixteen, you couldn't wait until you were eighteen and out on your own either in college or making all that money in a full-time job. When you were eighteen, you couldn't wait until you were twenty-five so your car insurance would go down. And, as my old coach warned us when we were in high school, when a person turns twenty-five, there was something else we couldn't wait for. Seems like it will always be that way, doesn't it.

Since LifeSpring was born four years ago, we have looked forward to the day when we could leave the school and have a place we could call our own. While we haven't quite arrived there yet, today is an important step in that direction. I am looking forward to the day when we can set up all our equipment and leave it there after we worship on Sunday morning. I'm looking forward to the day when our worship team can meet during the week to rehearse without the hassle of deciding where we will meet. I'm looking forward to the day when our children and youth ministries can have midweek activities.

But before we rush off into the future, let's take a moment to look over our shoulders. These four years have been an important time.

On Thursday evening this past week, Natalie walked down the aisle with her friends to celebrate the completion of their high school days at Oak Park. These last few weeks have been filled with lots of preparation, including some time to think back over their academic careers and share memories. I'm confident there were lots of conversations that began with "Remember when...."

Let's have that conversation now...let's *remember when*. I warned you a few moments ago that we would take some time to allow for sharing memories of our years here at the school. So what will you remember about Northview as we move on into the future?

CONGREGATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Remembering those moments will always be treasured. But to make the most of those memories, we need to consolidate and summarize them into lessons that we can use for our benefit into the future. And as I was wrestling with how to do that this past week, I visited several places in the Bible where we could turn to shape our thinking. The one that stood out the most was a portion of the prayer Jesus offered as He thought about an important transition that His closest followers were about to experience. On the night before His crucifixion, you would think that all Jesus could pray about was His own strength to endure the horrific experience in front of Him. And while that was certainly on His mind, listen to what else He prayed about...

John 17:20-26

²⁰I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony. ²¹My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father--that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me. ²²I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are-- ²³I in them and you in me, all being perfected into one. Then the world will know that you sent me and will understand that you love them as much as you love me. ²⁴Father, I want these whom you've given me to be with me, so they can see my glory. You gave me the glory because you loved me even before the world began! ²⁵O righteous Father, the world doesn't know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. ²⁶And I have revealed you to them and will keep on revealing you. I will do this so that your love for me may be in them and I in them.
(NLT¹)

I can never read these verses without pausing to think, "Jesus is actually praying for our generation...for the believers at LifeSpring here today...for you and for me."

A few years ago, I was going through a very difficult time in my life. One day, the phone rang and my administrative assistant told me that the caller was Ken Idleman, the president of Ozark Christian College. This is a man that is known and respected by thousands of people throughout America and around the world. And he was calling because he heard about the difficulties I was facing, and he wanted me to know that he was praying for me. Wow...the idea that a leader like that would remember me in his prayers...well, I felt very encouraged by that.

I feel even more encouraged to know that Jesus prayed for me. Don't you? Even then, He could look forward to the struggles that would be in the way of the generations that followed Him. Even now, He knows exactly what is happening with us. And as we stop right now to look back and summarize what we have learned, Jesus' prayer is a valuable lens to bring all those experiences into focus. So let's list what we can see?

God's Presence

Sing this verse with me...

¹ Scriptures marked "(NLT)" are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation copyright © 1996 by [Tyndale Charitable Trust](#). Used by permission of [Tyndale House Publishers](#).

*God is my refuge and my strength; a present help in time of need.
He is my Fortress, my Deliverer.
My Father, my Friend indeed.*

You won't find this kind of thinking in the language of any other religion on earth. Every other so-called deity is out of the reach of the people who worship it. But the One true God resides right in the middle of His people, inviting them into a very personal, intimate relationship with Him. That's what we were created for. In the Garden of Eden, before sin entered the world, the Bible portrays the relationship between God and Adam as a friendship that allowed for walks together at the end of the day... similar to the type of walks I had with one of our next-door neighbors years ago. That original environment of companionship may have been ruined by sin, but that never dampened God's hunger for our friendship. The story of the Bible is the step by step process God has taken throughout human history to restore what was lost... He saved Noah from the flood, and then a few generations later God called Abraham to leave his home city to go to a new land, and then God nurtured the family of Abraham into a huge nation of Israelites, and then God sent Moses to lead this nation from slavery into a Promised Land. And while they are on the way, God gives them instructions for a special place of worship that would represent His presence, and guess where He wanted them to put it. Right in the middle of their encampment. On and on throughout the Old Testament, God continues to reveal more and more about Himself and become more and more accessible to His people. And it all culminates with Jesus... God in the form of a man... and now His Spirit lives right in the hearts of the people who have invited Him in.

Sometimes we may question if God is really present in our ministry. At those times when key families have decided to leave LifeSpring to attend other churches, we hurt and we wonder if God really is involved in what we are doing. Sometimes our efforts seem to accomplish little or nothing. Sometimes it seems like everything we are doing doesn't matter. And when we have a special project that doesn't get the results we were hoping, we wonder if God is involved in what we are doing. And then what?

Our Faith

When we can't *feel* God's presence... when we start to question if He really is involved in this ministry... I have discovered that these are the times when the reality of our faith is measured. The second lesson we've learned is that we need to have faith in God's presence.

Hundreds of years ago, a group of people stood on the borders of a land God had promised to give them. Before continuing, they decided to send in a group of spies to scout out what was ahead. Twelve men were chosen and commissioned. **Numbers 13** says that after forty days, they came back with their report. Two out of the twelve came back with confidence. "Let's go! This is a great opportunity! God has brought here for this purpose. What are we waiting for?" So, did the people charge across the border and receive the promise God had made them?

Numbers 13:31-33

³¹But the other men who had explored the land with him answered, "We can't go up against them! They are stronger than we are!" ³²So they spread discouraging reports about the land among the Israelites: "The land we explored will swallow up any who go to live there. All the people we saw were huge. ³³We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. We felt like grasshoppers next to them, and that's what we looked like to them!" (NLT)

Guess who the people believed. After all, they were only human, right? How could they go up against giants? They weren't trained in the ways of battle. A mere two years earlier, they had been slaves in Egypt. Never mind that God had demonstrated by ten plagues that He was on their side and that He was more powerful than the mightiest empire in their world. Never mind that He had pulled back the waters of the Red Sea so that they could walk across on dry ground. Did God really expect them to believe that He would defeat the giants and give them this land? Yes...He did. And because they didn't, He sent them back into the wilderness to wander around until every single person in that generation had died off. Everyone, that is, except the two that were ready to believe Him.

Now, all these generations later, we stand on the border of a new dwelling place in our history as a church. We can look across the way and see giants that intimidate us. There's the giant of expense, because it will cost us more money to build this ministry. Over there is the giant named, "I don't know who to invite to church"...and standing next to him is his twin brother, "I don't know how to talk about my faith." Other giants live there, too...each one wears the name of an obstacle or a doubt that stands in the way of LifeSpring becoming the church we have dreamed it could be. Over the past four years, we've watched some very good people decide that the giants were too big.

But I have faith that God is present in this ministry. I've watched Him work in your lives. Every one of you is different than the day you walked through those doors. Every time I am tempted to question that, all I have to do is look into your eyes. Jesus' prayer predicts that when we are united with each other and with Him, glory will be the result. I believe that God will continue using LifeSpring to touch and change lives.

God's Provision

And I believe that He will provide the resources we need to do that. That's the third lesson that has been imprinted on my soul over the past four years.

2 Peter 1:3

³Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God. (MSG²)

God gives us the ability to please Him. God gives us the opportunity to please Him. God gives us the resources to please Him.

We started worshipping together in the Spring of 2001 as a prelude to a grand opening scheduled for October of 2002. The marketing campaign for the grand opening was built around a mailing campaign that involved sending a series of three postcards to 34,000 homes in the surrounding area. That's a total of more than 100,000 postcards...boy, was I glad that I didn't have to lick the stamps! The cost of this project was over \$21,000. I will never forget how tight my throat felt as we worked to raise the money. And I will never forget the chills I felt when we counted up the pledges and realized that God had provided.

Look back again at Jesus' prayer. See how often He mentions what God has given. God gave Jesus glory. God gave Jesus followers. God gave love. God gave revelation.

Do you believe God is going to provide for our ministry?

² Quotations labeled (MSG) have been taken from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

Our Action

I'm sure we all do. But there is an important quirk about God's provision that we often overlook. God's provision works hand in hand with our action.

A few years ago, a popular Christian author and speaker named Tony Campolo was scheduled to speak for a large group of women at a World Day of Prayer event. Before he was introduced, the leader of the meeting produced a letter from a missionary in Venezuela who had a hospital, and they needed \$5,000 desperately to put an extension on the hospital because they couldn't handle all the patients. The leader turned to Campolo and asked, "Brother, would you please lead us in prayer that the Lord would provide for our sister in Venezuela?" And Campolo said, "No!" As he spoke to another group several months later, he described how his response caught everyone off guard.

I stood up, and I said, "I'll tell you what I will do"—and it was a good day to pull it off because I was only carrying \$2.25—I pulled out my wallet, and I pulled out the two dollars and a quarter, and I slapped it down on the pulpit and I said, "That's all the money I'm carrying. Madame Chairman, I want you to put all the cash you're carrying on the pulpit." And there were about 1,000 women in this group. I said, "I'm going to ask each of you to do the same. No checks. Just the cash you're carrying. Bring it up. Lay it on the altar. We'll count up the money, and if we don't have enough, I will ask God to write out a check for the difference." The woman took out \$110 of unadulterated cash and put it with my \$2.25. A hundred and ten dollars in cash! Why didn't I marry somebody like that? I said, "We're on our way; we've got \$112.25." I said, "You're next," and I pointed to a woman on the front row. She looked around. I said, "I'm serious. Come up here and put your money on the altar." You see, I come from a black church, and you know that's the way you take up an offering, you see. And she sheepishly came up and put her money on it, and I said, "Okay let's line up and do it one by one." And they did it! Money kept on piling up and piling up and piling up. When it was all over, we counted the cash. And we had over \$7,000, instead of the five that was being required! And I know we didn't get it all because I could see women giving me dirty looks as they walked by. And I said, "The sheer audacity of asking God for \$5,000, when God has already provided more than \$7,000."³

Have we been guilty of doing what these women wanted to do? Are we asking God to provide without being willing to take action? Has God already provided, but we are unconsciously hanging onto those resources or using them to serve our own agenda? Building an ever-growing, life-changing ministry takes more of everything than we think we have...more money, more energy, more creativity, more courage, and the list goes on. God could make it easy on us, but He has chosen to operate in partnership with us. He honors us by giving us the choice about the level that our partnership reaches. Of course, we can't do it without Him, but He also refuses to do it without us.

And this leads us to what may be the greatest lesson of all...

God's Victory

At the risk of being simplistic, I want to offer an equation to help us remember these lessons and to see what it takes to experience God's victory in our lives.

³ Tony Campolo, from remarks made at the Religious Liberty Council luncheon (6-27-03); source: <http://www.bjcpa.org/Pages/Resources/Pubs/Campolospeech.html>; submitted by Eric Sparrman, Shawnee, Kansas. Copied from PreachingToday.com, copyright © 2005 by PreachingToday.com & Christianity Today, International.

(God's Presence x Our Faith) + (God's Provision x Our Action) = God's Victory

Do you see the relationship between these factors? God's presence is always available to us, but the depth of our experience of His presence is determined by the strength of our faith. God's provision is unlimited, but it is released to the extent of our action.

CONCLUSION

Today, as we prepare to conclude our time here at Northview, I want to offer you an opportunity to express your faith by action. For the past few weeks, we have been talking about a special commitment. We anticipate that our expenses are going to increase over the next couple of months as we move to different facilities. Therefore, we need to increase our income. LifeSpring depends on your contributions. But even more significant than that is the fact that the way we handle our money is one of the leading indicators in the strength of our faith. So I'm asking you to consider increasing your faith over the coming months by increasing your financial commitment. Hopefully, that commitment has been determined by plenty of thought and prayer. So, in a moment as Deb comes to share a very special song of dedication, I will ask you to come forward and share both your offering for today (in the offering plates on the table) and the anonymous portion of the form that has been included in your program this morning. And if you are not prepared to share, please take the form with you and send back the anonymous portion in the mail.

But before we do that, I want us to read together a very special declaration that was recited a few weeks ago by 30,000 people who attended the 25th anniversary of Saddleback Church in California. May it be a true expression of the intentions of our hearts and a prediction of the lives that we will lead from this moment forward.

TODAY I AM STEPPING ACROSS THE LINE. I'M TIRED OF WAFFLING, AND I'M FINISHED WITH WAVERING. I'VE MADE MY CHOICE; THE VERDICT IS IN; AND MY DECISION IS IRREVOCABLE. I'M GOING GOD'S WAY. THERE'S NO TURNING BACK NOW!

I WILL LIVE THE REST OF MY LIFE SERVING GOD'S PURPOSES WITH GOD'S PEOPLE ON GOD'S PLANET FOR GOD'S GLORY. I WILL USE MY LIFE TO CELEBRATE HIS PRESENCE, CULTIVATE HIS CHARACTER, PARTICIPATE IN HIS FAMILY, DEMONSTRATE HIS LOVE, AND COMMUNICATE HIS WORD.

SINCE MY PAST HAS BEEN FORGIVEN AND I HAVE A PURPOSE FOR LIVING AND A HOME AWAITING IN HEAVEN, I REFUSE TO WASTE ANY MORE TIME OR ENERGY ON SHALLOW LIVING, PETTY THINKING, TRIVIAL TALKING, THOUGHTLESS DOING, USELESS REGRETTING, HURTFUL RESENTING, OR FAITHLESS WORRYING. INSTEAD, I WILL MAGNIFY GOD, GROW TO MATURITY, SERVE IN MINISTRY, AND FULFILL MY MISSION IN THE MEMBERSHIP OF HIS FAMILY.

BECAUSE THIS LIFE IS PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT, I WILL VALUE WORSHIP OVER WEALTH, "WE" OVER "ME," CHARACTER OVER COMFORT, SERVICE OVER STATUS, AND PEOPLE OVER POSSESSIONS,

POSITION, AND PLEASURES. I WILL KNOW WHAT MATTERS MOST, AND I'LL GIVE IT ALL I'VE GOT. I'LL DO THE BEST I CAN WITH WHAT I HAVE FOR JESUS CHRIST TODAY.

I WON'T BE CAPTIVATED BY CULTURE, MANIPULATED BY CRITICS, MOTIVATED BY PRAISE, FRUSTRATED BY PROBLEMS, DEBILITATED BY TEMPTATION, OR INTIMIDATED BY THE DEVIL. I'LL KEEP RUNNING MY RACE WITH MY EYES ON THE GOAL, NOT THE SIDELINES OR THOSE RUNNING BY ME. WHEN TIMES GET TOUGH, AND I GET TIRED, I WON'T BACK UP, BACK OFF, BACK DOWN, BACK OUT, OR BACKSLIDE. I'LL JUST KEEP MOVING FORWARD BY GOD'S GRACE. I'M SPIRIT-LET, PURPOSE-DRIVEN AND MISSION-FOCUSED, SO I CANNOT BE BOUGHT, I WILL NOT BE COMPROMISED, AND I SHALL NOT QUIT UNTIL I FINISH THE RACE.

I'M A TROPHY OF GOD'S AMAZING GRACE, SO I WILL BE GRACIOUS TO EVERYONE, GRATEFUL FOR EVERYDAY, AND GENEROUS WITH EVERYTHING THAT GOD ENTRUSTS TO ME.

TO MY LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST, I SAY: HOWEVER, WHENEVER, WHEREVER, AND WHATEVER YOU ASK ME TO DO, MY ANSWER IN ADVANCE IS YES! WHEREVER YOU LEAD AND WHATEVER THE COST, I'M READY. ANYTIME. ANYWHERE. ANYWAY. WHATEVER IT TAKES, LORD; WHATEVER IT TAKES! I WANT TO BE USED BY YOU IN SUCH A WAY THAT ON THAT FINAL DAY I'LL HEAR YOU SAY, "WELL DONE, THOU GOOD AND FAITHFUL ONE. COME ON IN, AND LET THE ETERNAL PARTY BEGIN!"⁴

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