

What are you going to do?

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

May 15, 2005

My message this morning is intended specifically for Erinn Lauterbach and Christine Ellison, our two graduating high school seniors and scholarship recipients, but the rest of you may listen in if you want!

Erinn, Christine ... What are you going to do?

For the first time in your lives, this is an interesting question. It's not very interesting to ask a graduating third grader -- *What are you going to do?* -- because you already know the answer -- *Go to fourth grade!* A graduating fourth grader is going to fifth grade and a graduating sophomore will be a junior.

But it is interesting to ask a graduating high school senior -- *What are you going to do?* -- because you don't already know the answer. There are any number of possibilities. For the first time in your lives, your next move is not predetermined. You choose. And that is the definition of adulthood -- choosing for yourself what you will do. Being an adult means making a choice, whatever that choice is, and taking responsibility for it.

So ... What are you going to do? Will you go to college? Will you work? Or will you do both? Will you choose a career path in business or in social work, in law or in medicine, in teaching or in ministry? What are you going to do?

It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter ...

Don't get me wrong. I do hope for both of you that you will do well, that you will find your niche in life, that you will enjoy productive and successful and fulfilling careers. I hope you will choose well and do well. But in the big picture, when you consider the meaning and purpose of your life as a whole, what you do doesn't really matter.

You may be able to speak the languages of human beings and even of angels -- you may be intelligent and articulate, a gifted and capable person -- but if you have no love ... who cares?

You may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; you may have all the faith needed to move mountains -- you may accomplish wonderful things; you may enjoy great success -- but if you have no love ... you are nothing!

You may give away everything you have -- you may make noble sacrifices and perform great acts of service to humankind -- but if you have no love ... it doesn't matter.

Love matters. If you do not have love, any amount of skill or success or sacrifice or service is meaningless. The reverse is also true: if you do have love, whether or not you accomplish this or that, whether or not you enjoy success, is not that important.

Love lasts. Other things -- abilities, careers, accomplishments -- have temporary and limited value. But love has permanent and lasting value. Your love leaves an imprint on another human life that can never be erased.

When you were a child, your speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that you are an adult, you have no more use for childish ways ...

You have spent an entire academic career, and much of your childhood, being judged on your performance. But as an adult, you need to realize that the truest measure of a person is not performance, but character.

So I don't care so much about what you are going to do. I care very much about who you are going to be! Being an adult is about making choices for yourself and taking responsibility for them. Making choices about what you will do is the easy part! Making choices about who you will be is the work of a lifetime. And as you make those choices, the daily choices that shape your character, you will be tested and challenged all along the way. Choosing love is not easy.

What is love?

Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up ...

Erinn: you are a person of strong loyalties ... loyalty to your family and to your church and to the United Church of Christ. You have at your core a strong and well-defined set of values. You say that you will stand fast to your values, and I will believe you will. This is what you bring to adulthood: loyalty, a strong inner core, clear values, commitment.

Now choose love ... love that is not jealous.

Envy is being bitter about what someone else has that you don't have. Jealousy is holding on tight and being protective of what you do have. Love is not jealous. Be generous with what you do have and don't keep it all for yourself! Love your family but enlarge it, too. Open your eyes and your heart to all the other brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers God has for you in God's family.

Stand fast to your values, but open your eyes and your mind to appreciate the values others hold dear. See the strengths and the gifts and the virtues God has placed in unexpected places. Appreciate, affirm, learn, grow, share.

Who knows? Maybe you will end up a member of a different church in a different denomination. Maybe you will live in a different state. Who knows what you will do or where you will be.

But let this be who you are ... a person of unwavering loyalty and firm conviction, and a person who is not jealous of what she has, but opens her heart and her life generously to her neighbor, whoever or wherever that neighbor may be.

Christine: you are a easy-going person, carefree and kind. You say you have learned here at this church not to judge people, but to welcome them into your life, and you do. This is what you bring into adulthood: a welcoming attitude, an accepting manner, a joyful spirit.

Now choose love ... love that never gives up.

Because your kindness will be tested! When you leave yourself open to people, when you readily welcome people into your life, you can get hurt. People will take advantage of you; people will betray you; you will be disappointed and disillusioned. Genuine love is not always returned.

But never give up! Give people a second chance and a third chance and a seventy-seventh chance! It violates common sense. It violates common sense to leave yourself vulnerable to injury or loss, but this world needs adults who do not follow common sense, but choose to follow Jesus!

Let this be who you are ... a person of unremitting kindness and uninhibited joy, a person who does not give up, but who lives and loves with purpose and dedication and hope.

Christine and Erinn ... I will be eager to see what you are going to do, what you are going to do with the rest of your lives. But above all, I will be eager to see what sort of adults you become.

When you were children, your speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that you are adults, you have no more use for childish ways ...

Most everything in your lives is fleeting and temporary. You were once children, but now are young adults. And soon, so soon, you will be middle-aged and even old! But after all is said and done, whatever you do or don't do, these three things will remain: faith and hope and love ... *and the greatest of these is love!*