

June 6, 2021 @ Trinity Bixby

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[Matthew 11:28-30](#) & Proverbs 2:1-12, 4:5-9, 9:7-10

At the time I graduated from highschool, there was a very popular program on television that asked an important question, one that I think everyone must have asked themselves when in the walls of our hallowed educational system: “What if highschool is hell?” That show was *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and in rewatching it recently, I was reminded of just how much of a time capsule it has become, preserving much that I recognize as the tech and attitudes of my schooling. Like many tv shows and novels geared towards young adults, *Buffy* focused on a young person, chosen for a task that she can’t explain to those around her. As much as she wanted to be a normal student, joining the cheer squad and spending time with friends, Buffy had a calling – to protect her town and ultimately the world from the vampires and demons that were squeezing into the world through a portal in her school. But despite believing that she had to walk this difficult path alone, she ends up having more success when leaning on the skills and care of her friends, and nearly every episode required her to learn something about both herself and the enemy she faced. In fact, it is through research, dedication, and companionship that she navigates through this highschool on the hellmouth – a trio of life skills that are useful to everyone in navigating life’s obstacles no matter where you are.

For the graduating seniors this year – you have spent your last year of school in a different kind of hellscape. Instead of clear goals and schedules, you’ve had to develop fortitude and resilience in the midst of a pandemic, You’ve been forced, earlier than most, to develop independent research skills, and demonstrate dedication above and beyond most of the rest of us. Meanwhile, the companionship that is so helpful in navigating together has been at least limited severely, where it hasn’t been outright removed. You’ve toughed it out – and are now embarking on the next phase of your life, which, God-willing, should be much less confusing and stressful than this past year.

“Everyone who is weary and carrying heavy burdens, come to me,” Jesus

said, “and I will give you rest. Take my yoke for yourself, and I will teach you.” It may sound a bit strange, taking a yoke from someone – we don’t often talk about yokes in our life today. Yokes are boards that linked animals like oxen together, allowing them to pull as a team, with more strength than either animal could use alone. Teachers of the Jewish faith used the term “yoke” to mean everything that they taught – their way of reading the scriptures, their way of living it out, and their way of teaching it to others. It represents a connection to others, all “pulling the same way.” Often, these spiritual yokes were difficult to follow, involving taking extra steps to make sure you were as righteous as possible, and guarding your way from accidentally sinning. But Jesus’ promise was different – he promised to give rest to those who took up his yoke! I envision Jesus’ yoke as not a board around the shoulders of draft animals, but something more like a tandem bicycle. It’s a lot easier to pedal when you have the energy to do so, and then rest as Jesus pedals forward for a while.

I may be stretching the metaphor a bit, but given the stress of all the spinning in place over this last year, it’s nice to think that Jesus gives us permission and encouragement to rest as we need to. Be sure to take the time to have quiet moments, not just throwing yourself into every activity to fill your day, just because we’ve spent so much time away from those activities. In your time of quiet, pray and listen for God’s response. It’s much easier to follow God – to ride tandem with Jesus - when you take the time to listen for where God is leading you!

Indeed, the book of Proverbs begins with a theme that is often repeated throughout: “Turn your ear toward Wisdom, and stretch your mind for understanding.” Now, I love the first nine chapters of Proverbs – it’s a wonderful letter from a nobleman to his son, a window into educational practices of the ancients, and a way to see what advice is so timeless that it applies yet today. And my favorite part is how Wisdom is personified as a wise woman, calling out for people to listen to her words and act as she does. In this way, she is seeking those who are searching for her. And once you have found Wisdom, she acts as a guardian against evil and falsehood, or as the intro to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* puts it,

“wielding the strength and skill to stop... the forces of darkness, to stop the spread of evil.”

Proverbs goes on to say: “Get Wisdom. Get understanding. Don’t abandon her, and she will guard you. Love her, and she will protect you... The beginning of wisdom is this: get wisdom!” Or, in other words, the beginning of wisdom is seeking wisdom. Really, it’s that hard and that simple: seek wisdom to gain wisdom. But how do you start on the path towards wisdom? Elsewhere, the book of Proverbs says, “the beginning of wisdom is fear [or reverence] of the Lord.” When you stop and contemplate what God wants for you, that is the beginning of wisdom – the first step towards following God’s plans for you, of taking Jesus’ yoke, and being filled with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

But that’s not the end. While the journey begins with the step of seeking Wisdom for yourself, it’s important that it not stop with that step! In the Medieval world, the love of wisdom was seen as the “queen of education”. When Medieval scholars read that “Wisdom has built her house... on seven pillars,”¹ they designed the education system with seven distinct paths, all linked together through philosophy, which means “the love of Wisdom.” These seven paths were called the “freeing sciences” or the “liberal arts” – arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, rhetoric, grammar, logic, and music. While we could quibble about which arts and sciences make up the seven pillars today, Wisdom is still found at the center, pointing the way to understanding God’s plan for us.

Once you have found Wisdom, Proverbs tells us, you should teach others the Way that Wisdom has taught you. You won’t be able to teach everyone – but you can teach some, and that is more than enough. Even reaching one other person, encouraging them to seek God’s wisdom – that’s wonderful. It is a lifelong task, of helping people to seek Wisdom on their own, accepting them and encouraging them enough to find the Way that Jesus has set before them. Maybe you’ve had a teacher that has helped you on this way – and maybe you’ll become that teacher yourself.

¹ Proverbs 9:2

No matter where God calls you, or what the Spirit inspires you to do, know that you can follow Jesus' Way of love by seeking Wisdom. "The beginning of Wisdom is this: Get Wisdom!"

May you research God's Way, seeking wisdom. May you be dedicated to Christ's path, showing love. And may you be filled with the Holy Spirit, overflowing with knowledge and understanding, so that you, too, may be a teacher of the Way. Amen.