

APNTS Commencement Message May 5, 2018

Amazing Promises – Amazing Grace

Good morning, and Congratulations on making it to this very special day. You have worked hard, and now it is time to celebrate!!!

I have enjoyed getting to know some of you as I have spent time at APNTS in past years. And it is an honor to be able to speak to you this morning as you prepare to begin a new chapter of your life, and enter a major transition into new ministry possibilities.

When I first became a professor at Asbury Seminary, students were required to participate in 3 Integrative Reflection Seminars.

The first seminar was for new students focused on helping students to get acquainted with one another and learn how to succeed in Seminary.

Seminar number 2 was for students to process what they were learning in their supervised ministry experiences,

The third seminar was for seniors. It focused on getting ready to leave the seminary and go out into Ministry.

One year I was trying to decide on devotions for the 3rd seminar.

I found what I was looking for in the Gospel of John, chapters 13-17.

The disciples had been in “Seminary” with Jesus for 3 years.

But Jesus knew that the seminary program was coming to an end.

He was leaving his students very soon and sending them out into ministry.

He also knew he needed to do all he could to prepare them to go on without his physical presence with them.

This morning I want us to listen in as Jesus prepares his disciples for what is ahead.

And hopefully there will be some key insights for each of us as we listen in.

They had just finished the Passover Meal, and Judas had left the room.

The other disciples didn’t know why he had left, but Jesus knew.

Now Jesus is alone with the 11 disciples.

John tells us Jesus loved these friends.

They had been together almost constantly for 3 years as Jesus was preparing them to take over his ministry.

He had lived his life before them,
Showing them God's power and love in action
Teaching them, in word and by example how to do ministry
Answering their questions,
And sometimes correcting them.

He knew these men very well, and he knew they were expecting him to be recognized as the Messiah who would drive out the Romans, and they would rule Israel with him. But Jesus knew what was really about to happen, and he had only a few hours to prepare them.

He began this final seminar with the shocking announcement, "I will be with you only a little longer."

Soon he would leave them, and they could not go with him.

They were shocked, confused.

But Jesus lovingly comforted them and instructed them.

"I will not leave you as orphans," he promised.

He had a plan for them. "I will ask the Father and he will send the Spirit, the Helper to be with you always."

Jesus wanted His disciples to understand this wonderful gift of God's Spirit.

As we listen in on Jesus teaching the disciples we learn that the presence of the Spirit is even better than the physical presence of the human Jesus.

The Spirit is with us all, in any place at any time.

And **not only with us, but the Spirit is in us.**

The word John used for the Spirit, is translated using several different English words:

Helper, Advocate, Comforter, Spirit of truth.

All these roles are wrapped up in the Greek word John used.

In the future **when the disciples felt tired and weak, the Helper would be there** to give strength, to help carry the burden.

If they were sad or discouraged, the Comforter would be with them bringing peace, and encouragement.

And when they were attacked or misunderstood, the Advocate would speak up for them.

After teaching and mentoring his friends for 3 years, Jesus knew there was much more they needed to know to fulfill the ministry assigned to them.

“Soon you will have a new teacher,” Jesus told them. “when the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.” (16:13)

God’s Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, would be with them to guide them into deeper understandings, to instruct them when they faced new situations, and provide wisdom to answer new questions.

What an Amazing gift

Jesus also gave the disciples a powerful metaphor to help them understand their new relationship with Jesus, God the Father, and the Spirit.

“I am the vine,” Jesus told them, “you are the branches, and my Father is the gardener.” Remain (abide) in me, and I will remain in you. Those who remain in me will bear much fruit. “

We might picture the nourishing sap that flows through the vine into the branches as the Holy Spirit, the Spirit within us, causing the good fruit to grow and mature.

Notice that Jesus instructs the disciples to “remain” or “abide” in him. He does not say, “Work hard and struggle to keep connected to the vine.

Instead Jesus says, “I have loved you even as the Father loved me. Remain in my love.

When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love.

Jesus calls us to an ongoing relationship with him, trusting his love, and obeying His commands, to pass the love of God on to others.

And this passing on of God’s love is possible as we welcome, and depend on God’s Spirit within us.

In John 17 we learn that Jesus is not praying for just the 11 Disciples, he is praying for all who will follow put their faith in Jesus.

He is praying for each one of you.

Jesus is sending you into ministry just as he sent those first disciples.

Into a life of ministry that brings the greatest joy and also will have many challenges.

But you do not go alone!

**Go knowing that Jesus has not left you as orphans, but has sent the Spirit to be with you,
and in you.**

What Amazing Grace.