



June 8: Rising Strong: From Uncertainty to Confidence | Deuteronomy 31:8

Congratulations to Gabriel and all our high school seniors! What a joy for us, as your church family, to celebrate your accomplishments.

We celebrate the final faith steppingstone this church has set before you—high school graduation. Even as you reach this milestone, we know your journey of following Jesus is lifelong, filled with new steps and deeper trust.

It is our desire that you may continue to RISE STRONG from uncertainty to greater confidence in your relationship with God one step at a time.

But also “Congratulations” to ALL who have moved up a year in school...whether grade school, middle school, high school, or college. Congratulations also to those who keep learning and becoming.

As the Bishop is fond of saying, **“We all do better when we all do better.”**

As we celebrate your milestone, we also bring to a close our own season of learning and reflecting on this new life in Christ. And oh the places we have gone together!

We explored rising from doubt into greater faith, rising from denial to self-forgiveness, rising from hatred into loving service, from grief to unshakable joy, from darkness to light, to today...rising strong from uncertainty into confidence.

And what better way to close out our last five weeks together than with, Oh the Places You'll Go, a story that has helped so many take their next steps in life with greater confidence?

Theodore Seuss Geisel, Dr. Seuss had a rare gift of sharing truths with children using humor, clever rhyming, dynamically colorful illustrations, without ever being condescending.

He wrote this, his final book, while he was battling cancer. Published in 1990, one year before his death, it immediately became a best seller.

This powerful story is full of meaning. Full of insights in being human and the challenges we all face, this book was Dr. Seuss' parting gift to us all...young and old.

I was reminded of its power during a cold winter night, this January, in a drafty fellowship hall. A Conference leader read it to 25 pastors—many of us in coats—gathered close for warmth and encouragement. Though written for children, it spoke straight to our adult hearts.

It reminded us that life is full of opportunities, setbacks, detours, slumps, and waiting. And yet, there is hope—in the words of Seuss, “we start happening too”. We needed that hope.

As pastors navigating the challenges of Covid, denominational shifts, economic uncertainties, and political strife, we needed a story like that. A reminder to RISE STRONG from the things that have shaken us, toward resilience and joy again, trusting in God’s goodness to us.

We needed a good story and it was a godsend to us that evening. And maybe we can find our reflections on it a gift to us as well. Let’s affirm again as the people of God, life is good and a good gift to us from God, and it is a good communal practice to pause and celebrate those truths now and again.

So, here are a few words of wisdom from Dr. Seuss’ Oh the Places You Will Go. Bittersweet moment, maybe our last chance to speak into the lives of our graduates before they take off to great places and grand adventures.

Congratulations! Today is your day! You’re off to Great Places! You’re off and away!

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You’re on your own, and you’ll know what to know, and you are the guy who will decide where to go.

You look up and down the streets, look them over with care, about some you will say, “I don’t choose to go there”. With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet, You’re too smart to go down any not so good street.

And you may not feel any you’ll want to go down. In that case, of course, you’ll head straight out of town.

It’s open there in the wide-open air.

Out there, things can happen, and frequently do, to people as brainy and footsie as you. And when things start to happen, don’t worry. Don’t stew. Just go right along. You’ll start happening too.

Oh, the places you go!

Just a small taste of Seuss’ genius.

In talking to a friend last week about this book, I was reminded adults remember Seuss' "waiting place" the most from this story.

A few more words from Seuss...

The waiting place...for people just waiting.

Waiting for a train to go

Or a bus to come, or a plane to go

Or the mail to come, or the rain to go

Or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow

Or waiting around for a Yes or No

Or waiting for their hair to grow.

Everyone is just waiting.

Well, you know I am a big fan of waiting. 4 minutes is a marathon for me. And even though waiting is universal, how do these statistics sit with you?

According to Timex, Americans wait:

32 minutes at the doctor

13 hours a year on hold

38 to 50 hours a year in traffic

And...37 billion hours each a year waiting in line.

That made me chuckle.

Sounds about right, though. It can feel like a billion hours when waiting in line. I am surprised they didn't tally the hours we wait in line at the DMV office!

So, friends,...what are you waiting for?

Here at church, I know some of you have been waiting for test results on your health, and to heal fully, waiting for a way to be pain free, for physical and emotional fires to be contained,

for a daughter to come through a risky pregnancy and a granddaughter to come into this world safely – which they did,

for a relative to make better life choices. And a few shared stories in which they are waiting to be forgiven.

Waiting is universal, we are all probably waiting for something.

I was reminded of this poignant truth last week, as my cats waited for me to get up and feed them. Dr. Seuss found himself in one of life's most difficult of all waiting places—facing the end of his journey, as cancer took its toll on his body.

As a church we wait too. Praying and searching for two new staff leaders. We, all of us here, are in a season of waiting for God's provision. Please keep praying and sharing about these positions.

Waiting is one of God's favorite tools. God made Abraham and Sarah wait 90 years to have Isaac.

God made the Israelites wait 400 years in Egypt.

400 more years passed between the last word in the Old Testament to the first word in the New Testament.

Jesus commanded his disciples to wait. He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift the Father promised, **"...in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."** The outpouring of the Holy Spirit that we call Pentecost.

Today is Pentecost Sunday—the day the Spirit came not while the disciples rushed ahead, but as they waited.

A comforting and important reminder that even in our pauses, God's power moves. That maybe because of our pauses, the Spirit can more powerfully move in our midst.

All of creation waits, groaning as in pains of childbirth, waiting for the end of this age, for all things to be made new.

Still we wait – for healing, wholeness, for Christ's return.

So today, as we celebrate our graduates, we give thanks. We give thanks for the bright days and even the many waiting places, because it is there we often find God waiting for us.

What an interesting thought, God is waiting for us.

In seasons of waiting, we often discover and receive the greatest gift one can receive: the gift of God giving us God's self. While we long for answers or change, God offers us through the Spirit- a sense of God's Presence, peace, and love.

Waiting then becomes sacred when we realize it's not about what we get, but who we meet in our places of need—the Lord with us, Emmanuel.

As we wait for God to comfort our hearts and give us strength, it is a time for us to lean on our scriptures, to cling to them as they remind us:

- **Proverbs:** Surrender and trust. Trust fully in God even when you don't understand.

- **Isaiah:** Listen. God guides you—His voice behind you, whispering, “This is the way.”
- **Lamentations:** And wait. The Lord is good to those who wait on him.

Pentecost reminds us that even in uncertainty, the Spirit works through God’s Words to minister to our hearts, to offer comfort and strength.

The Spirit calms and reminds, waiting is not wasted time. In it, we learn to lean on God, to listen for His direction, and trust His timing. And even RISE STRONG from places of uncertainty into greater confidence.

God’s Spirit meets us with sufficient grace to endure as we wait.

So, as we RISE STRONG from seasons of hesitation into holy confidence. May we do so with renewed confidence - trusting not just in where we go, but also in the One who goes with us, each step of the way. Amen.

In lieu of our Time of Reflection, please allow me to close with a prayer for us.

Let’s pray together:

Gracious and loving God,

Thank you for every step—for open roads and winding paths, for joy and challenge, movement and stillness. Thank you for our graduates and all who are rising strong into new beginnings.

In seasons of waiting, help us draw near to you. In uncertainty, teach us to rise strong in your faithfulness. Let your Spirit guide our feet and lift our heads. May we go forward knowing your love goes with us—faithful, steadfast, and true. In the name of Jesus, our risen Lord, we wait for You. Amen.