

**Coming and Goings**  
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**A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church**  
**5-19-2019**  
**John 13:31-35**

In this morning's text, the Evangelist places us in an interesting moment. It's a moment of transition. For twelve chapters, we've read about the arrival of God in the world. Jesus, the Word made flesh has appeared. And he's been a teacher, holding a kind of college of his own for his pupils – the twelve disciples we know of, and the dozen or so unnamed women who accompanied them. And in this divine community, Jesus has been a safety net. How do these neophytes know that they're doing things right? They watch their teacher, and they ask their teacher, and they learn from their teacher. It's a lot easier to feed five thousand people when your mentor is present. And it's a lot easier to articulate your theology to inquisitive scribes when you've got the counsel of your wise rabbi.

But all along, Jesus has told them that his physical presence will be temporary. God's gonna be rejected by God's own people. And God's disciples will have to leave the protection of this little cocoon, and the confidence of being part of Jesus' entourage.

So Judas excuses himself from supper. And he heads out into the night to do his last bit of informing for the authorities. And Jesus knows the hour is no longer approaching. It's come. Soon, Jesus must go.

Allie and Kaleb, the hour has come for you, too. Not in the same way it came for Jesus and his disciples. I'm not suggesting that your graduations mean you are being tossed out of the door and thrown to authorities eager to confront you and haul you off. But you are in a period of transition. And this is a moment, in which you, too, must go.

For the last four years, you've lived in schools of your own. There have been schedules, and rules, and norms, and teachers (some you may have loved, some not so much) that have helped to define the standards of your community. How do you know you've performed well? Your test scores and grades validate or acknowledge your mastery. What happens when you forget the fifth step in solving that complex Algebra equation? Your teacher helps guide you to the end. How do you know where you are supposed to go? There's a schedule, and a bell, and doors with numbers on them, maybe a syllabus, too.

All of this structure has prepared you for a new moment, or a new phase. But you are in this weird place. Because even though all of the work has been done, there's still a little time, at least for you, Kaleb, until the diploma hits your hand, and you get to slide that tassel to the side.

And you may both have some anxiety. That's understandable. You may be wondering if you know all you are supposed to know for this next step. I remember a college professor telling our accounting class: "I promise, one day, you'll learn how to do balance sheets. And people will pay you to do this. And you are gonna get it right, because we're preparing you well." I appreciated that sentiment, but I think I also spent about six hours proofing the first one I was paid to do, because Dr. Arnold wasn't on my shoulders.

Of course, the two of you have had four years to prepare for this coming to going moment. And the timeline has been pretty obvious. I'm sure the phrase, "Just wait till we're seniors," has been uttered a

time or two. And even at fifteen, when three years may have seemed like a lifetime, at least you had a tangible sense of timing.

The disciples don't have that luxury. When Jesus speaks about what is to come, he's vague and veiled. And the disciples have no idea what his absence will mean. Just like you, and I'm sure everyone in this room, the disciples are anxious about encountering the unknown. "How are we gonna know what do when we finally arrive in the places we don't know?"

What's the world look like when we don't get to walk with Jesus by our side? What's the world sound like, when we don't hear Jesus' voice? Who's gonna guide us, when Jesus isn't here to guide us?

What's it gonna feel like when I have lunch next fall, and it's with a new set of friends? What's it gonna be like when I start forging my own path? And how am I gonna know my GPS is working?

Jesus offered advice to anxious, unknowing disciples as he transitioned from coming to going. I think he offers each of us that same advice whether we're graduating from high school, or college, or just from one day to the next:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 31:34-35)

In other words, I think Jesus says, "You got this. You've been my people. And I have loved you. I've listened to you. I've broken bread with you. I've cried with you, I've laughed with, I've lived among you. We've philosophized, and we've worked, and we've walked into places familiar and foreign, and we've even spent idle time: playing, and being silly, and soaking up sunshine. We've been in relationship with one another. That means we've loved and we've hurt and we've forgiven and we've been reconciled and we've been transformed, and we've done it over and over again."

"And when I'm gone, all you need to do to keep me present, is to love and to be reconciled with others, in the same way I've loved and been reconciled with you."

The disciples didn't know it right away, but they were equipped to become the people God called them to become.

Allie and Kaleb, you might not know it yet either, but you are also equipped to be the people God calls you to be. You've been in communities that recognize and encourage your gifts. And we've seen you use them well, even when you may not have noticed that you were sharing them at all. You have been present to us. Your songs, your smiles, your encouragement, your words, your energy, your very lives, have been love for us.

In this fleeting moment, where you transition to whatever your new world may bring, we, your church family, want to tell you: "You've got this. So keep doing your thing. Because if the larger world you encounter receives the kind of love you've given to us; the life of Jesus, the spirit of Jesus, the love of Jesus, they're always gonna be present.

May it be so! Amen.