

Highschool Baccalaureate Service at the Baptist Church, Annapolis Royal
June 24, 2018 7 p.m The Rev. Elisabeth Bachem-Jennings

“Don't be afraid”

What an amazing time this is for you !

The final day of classes done and over with.

From now on, no one can force you to go on learning...ready for a break?

I can understand that very well. I also hope from the bottom of my heart, you will always see yourself as a student in some form, and enjoy learning!, “ A wise persons knows they know nothing. Only a fool thinks they know everything” Proverbs. People are afraid of what they don't understand and that kind of fear of whats different leads to unkind and unhealthy behaviour. I say that (with a sad headshaking look) to those who want the quick fix for complicated problems (south of the border and in our own country!), and with a very appreciative nod to Malala Yususvsai and countless young people like her who understand the value of ongoing education...and I assume you are amongst them!

Amazing and exciting time, as many of you will soon be living away from home for the first time,,

and while you will stay connected via social media and cell phones with those you trust, you know that this graduation has a milestone feel to it. Nothing will ever be quite like it was when you were living at home. You probably can't wait for this independent life to begin, but perhaps you are also a bit worried- like what will that mean, making new friends and being separated from old ones? having to find a way to support myself ? Will anyone like me? Will I be bored? Or overwhelmed? Will I be lonely? How will I cope with living on a budget? Will everyone else have more successes to show for than I in a year or two?

Perhaps you do not worry about *these exact* things, perhaps you have other fears. To have fears at the beginning of a new venture is not only natural, it is also smart. Fears help us prepare ourselves, and think a bit before we launch ourselves into an adventure. And the lovely thing about the life that is

beginning now for you is : now more than ever you have the freedom to choose the new ventures you take up. If they make you afraid that does not mean you should not do it. It means you should think carefully before you decide and then find a way that fits. So here am I 4 decades older than you at the eve on an adventure I have chosen for myself this year:and its something I have never done. A pilgrimage. Starting tomorrow morning in Wolfville I will make my way back to Annapolis Royal on foot.(on the Harvest Moon Trail through our valley.) Like you, I am excited, but also a bit worried in what shape I will be once I am on the way..

The great thing is, that we must venture out and be brave, or we won't grow inside....and that is true whether you are 18 or 58 and anywhere in between!

Now I could talk to you about a couple of growing up and venturing out movies that I saw this year right here in Annapolis Royal, about the wisdom I saw in movies like Lady Bird (anyone saw that?)...a first year university growing up story, or “call me by your name” a growing into your sexual identity love story, (any one saw that?) where bitter heartbreak is part of the young adult experience.

But, since we are gathered in a church, and many of you are people of faith, lets take a closer look at a story from our faith tradition. Its a story about risk, and the future.

The Biblical story takes us back into the year 589 BC. Middle East, Kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

We venture into a situation where little Judah is about to be invaded by a powerful neighbour. The political and military leaders of Judah decide to play hardball. They invest in the military, train up soldiers and make a military alliance with another small neighbouring country. The king makes a proclamation: “Together we can defeat the powerful invaders,” right? Thats what the people want to hear.. Feeling strong like that helps keep the fears down. But one person is contrary: No, he writes and says in public: This will lead to a terrible war and a terrible defeat of our people. We can't win against this power. We must not defend ourselves because that will lead to more and more killing of innocent people. We must accept to be occuoied by this

mighty neighbour if they so choose to invade. You can imagine, that was not a popular position. It came from Jeremiah, prophet of Jewish Christian Faith tradition.

Jeremiah, is arrested and thrown into prison. But Jeremiah, person of deep faith, had come to understand that God asks that bloodshed be avoided. The military mobilization continues and war is imminent. Then the foreign army of the Babylonians invades, and the Judean army and allies are no match for them. They retreat into the fortified Jerusalem, and the Babylonians set up camp outside and besiege the city. While inside babies are crying and families are suffering. They are deeply afraid of the future, and with good reason. For two years the city of Jerusalem was besieged by the mighty Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar II, because the Jewish people had decided against Jeremiah's advice, to put up a stiff fight. Between 589-587 hundreds of civilians starved in the enclosed city, things were extremely dire, and everyone knew it was only a matter of time until the city would fall.

In this terrible situation Jeremiah, in jail, receives an inner message; God wants him to do a symbolic action. The stupidest real estate transaction in history: Jeremiah foresees that his people will lose this war and all their land. Yet, he hears from God that he is to buy a piece of property. A field, which will be ruined by the armies and confiscated by the Babylonians a few months from now – worth nothing! Why on earth would God ask him to do that?

Because a concrete sign of hope is needed in this fearful time.:There will be a good future again sometime, God speaks into Jeremiah's heart.

“Once more fields will be bought in this land of which you say, ‘It is a desolate waste, without people or animals, for it has been given into the hands of the Babylonians.’ **44** Fields will be bought for silver, and deeds will be signed, sealed and witnessed in the territory of Benjamin, in the villages around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah and in the towns of the hill country, of the western foothills and of the Negev, because I will restore their fortunes,[c] declares the Lord.”

In fact, when the Babylonian siege ended, the city of Jerusalem was completely destroyed, looked like Holms and Mosul and all those formerly beautiful places we see in Syria now. Its surviving people were deported. It took 70 years until the Jewish people were free from Babylonian captivity and could return to their ancestral lands again.

Then, Jeremiah's extended family (because he did not even have kids!) would come and see that field....did not uncle Jeremiah buy that like 70 years ago...? How good of him. We can make a new beginning here!

This is a story that speaks to our biggest fear: The fear of our future as people on this planet...do you sometimes think about that? I do. I worry: about the way our lifestyle alters the climate and the brutal consequences for animals and people, the extinctions, the tensions, the hatred between groups, if we will see war, what life will look like in 20, 40 years....

Is it right to be afraid of this? It is, because it's real –and a result of human stupidity- just like that terrible war was real for the people of Judah.

But as people of faith we do not need to be paralysed by fear of the future.

God does not save people from the consequences of stupidity and arrogance. But God wants Life and Hope and wants us to trust that a better Life is possible.

That's why the Divine asked Jeremiah to buy that field. Jeremiah was close to being paralysed by his fear of the future until he found God's guidance in his heart: Buy that field- as a concrete sign of hope. This message is echoed in the NT “ God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control.”

I did not tell you this story so that you would venture out as soon as you've got some money and make a risky real estate transaction.

I do tell it because I want you to listen for God's words of Hope in your life.

What will be the thing you need to risk, so you have hope for your life?

When you venture out, what will your concrete actions be that express God's hope for your Life?

Will you plant a tree? Run a marathon for Mental health? Work overseas to help others? Pardon my limited imagination.

God can and will make way more innovative actions of hope emerge from your hearts...

When it comes to our adventures, a bit of fear, I said at the beginning, can be a reasonable thing, can keep us from getting hurt through stupidity.

But when it comes to all of life that lies before you, don't be paralyzed. There will be difficult situations coming for you, as for all of us. Such is life.

Don't be afraid for deeds of hope are always possible.

Don't be afraid, for in any given situation there is always a way of love.

Don't be afraid, no matter how much you mess up, God's love is always just ahead of you to pull you towards a future of hope.

A month ago, I spent 4 days at a United Church conference with 180 youth and about the same number of grey haired fellow church people. We came from all over the Maritimes, and had never met before.

Yet over the 4 days, as we talked in small groups about the future of faith and church, so much hope emerged. On the last evening, 180 youth led worship.

They surrounded us "old" people with candles, and invited us all together to sing this song that I want to leave you, now, for our journeys into the future :

"Don't be afraid, my love is stronger, my love is stronger than your fear....

Don't be afraid, my love is stronger...and I have promised, promised to be always near...."