

(Recognition of Graduates)

“With Every Ending Comes New Beginnings”

Revelation 21:1-8

To borrow a line from Old Blue Eyes, Frank Sinatra “And now the end is near, and so you face your final week(s) of school.”

From your Pre-School days, to your first day of kindergarten, to those awkward middle school years, to now these final days of high school, you have been working towards this ending.

On Sunday afternoon, June 5, you will don your cap and gown, joining your classmates in procession, take your seat, listen to speeches by administrators, teachers and peers, then the joyful moment you have waited for all these years, you will walk across the stage as your name is called, receive your diploma, turn your tassel on your cap, and finally hear your principal introduce you to your families as the “Graduated Class of 2022 from Cambridge High School”! Caps will fly into the air as you cheer this major milestone in your life. The End!

This morning, we have gathered with you, your parents and family to celebrate this ending in your life. So it seemed to me, an appropriate scripture passage to share on this special Sunday taken from a book of the Bible that many believe is about the “End” - Revelation.

As a book, Revelation would be classified in the genre of Apocalyptic literature. You might also list under the category of “Dystopian” or “Science Fiction” literature.

Whatever category a library might list it under, where you will rarely find it, is read in church on a Sunday morning.

Reading from Revelation, and particularly this passage is generally reserved for the end of a person’s life, when it is shared at their funeral.

So why did I then choose to read from Revelation on this Sunday when we celebrate your graduation?

Because the Cambridge High School Class of 2022 motto is **“With Every Ending Comes New Beginnings.”**

Revelation may be the last book in the Bible, and many say it points to the end times, but it really isn’t about how things end for humankind, rather, it is about new beginnings.

Listen to these words in Revelation 21:1: **“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”**

Written at time of great world turmoil, persecution, violence, destruction and death at the hands of the Roman Empire under Caesar Domitian, sometime around 95-96 CE. The writer is believed to be John the Elder, who was imprisoned on the Greek island of Patmos, for speaking out against the Empire.

He is writing to seven faith communities (churches) located in modern day Turkey, encouraging them in the midst of all the evil, violence, death and destruction, to keep hope alive.

John isn't able to say directly what he wants to share with the people he is writing to, he knows the Empire will read his letters, so he writes in this creative style, using metaphors, apocalyptic imagery, and coda messages that they would be able to understand. He wants them to trust that as dark of times as it seems, God is with them still, and in the end, as it was in the beginning, God will make all things new.

John the Elder's words could easily have been written to you and your classmates given all you have been through in your short lives.

During your past 18 years, you have only known America at war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and now in Ukraine.

Your generation has had to practice lock-down drills for fear of yet another school shooting, which have become to common place in our nation, claiming far too many lives.

Your generation is facing a climate crisis that our generation has too long ignored, putting into question the future of the earth, God entrusted to our care.

You watched a violent insurrection against the United States Government unfold, that is still threatening to bring an end to our democracy and your future.

Your class has walked out, joining your peer, Greta Thunberg for global Climate Strikes; the youth from Parkland in the national March For Our Lives to

end gun violence; your classmates of color who are seeking racial justice by reminding us of our nation's true history and that Black Lives and Indigenous People's Lives Matter.

And you have had to face a global pandemic, which forced schools to close, moving your classes online, and has now claimed over a million lives, and is still very much impacting your lives and ours.

When you think about it, perhaps a better class motto might have been "I Survived!"

I am not sure how your class motto was chosen or who chose it, but I think it is very appropriate, and I would like to believe that John the Elder would concur.

"With every ending comes a new beginning" is a good way to sum up the whole of Revelation.

It is also the best way to describe this moment in your lives.

Yes, you are coming to the end of your primary and secondary education, you are not coming to the end of your learning. Life doesn't end nor does learning.

I am sure you have heard the phrase, "life-long learners". And you are, as you prepare to head off into your new beginnings at college.

The writer, John Irving, in his book, "The World According to Garp" says, **"You only grow by coming to the end of something and by beginning something else."**

This is the message of faith we proclaim as followers of Jesus, when we talk about death and resurrection. There can be no new life, new beginning, resurrection without bring an end to something.

Writing in his article - "The Most Revealing Book of the Bible", Vernard Eller says: **"John (the Elder) talks of a new heaven and a new earth. Yet it is significant that he speaks of a new heaven and earth rather than a completely different "something else," a "somewhere else" totally divorced from what had gone before. In short, although John wants to speak of newness, he also wants to affirm a continuity with what had been previously. God will make "all things new"--not "all new things."**

Trevor and Jacob, this applies to your lives as well. While your school days are coming to an end, there is a continuity that goes with you into the new beginnings before you.

All of your struggles and triumphs, challenges and successes, dreams and disappointments, memories of laughter and tears, do not end, really.

As the writer of Revelation is reminding his original audience and us today, God isn't bringing to an end all things, rather, God will take all of what God has created, the world, and all the evils, injustices, pains, sorrows, death and violence we inflict on each other and the planet which has been entrusted to our care and in the end will make "all things new" right here on earth, with us and among us.

That is how our faith story ends, not with death and destruction, but just as it did in Genesis 1, "in the beginning" with God creating "all things new."

Jacob and Trevor, let me close with the final words of the Bible: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you and all the saints. Amen."
(Revelation 22:21)