

Rite 13 Ceremony
The Rev. Emily Richards
November 12, 2017

Blessed by God and Community

Today is a big day! It is a great day! One of my absolute favorite occasions we share in as a parish family. Today, we gather to celebrate the lives of four of our young people, Ethan, Meg, Eli and Xavier, as they begin their journey to adulthood. I remember those first days when you and your families made St. Peter's your church home. I remember wistfully how you still looked up at me. Yes, there was such a time. Alright, maybe not for you Xavier. But there was time when at least we looked eye to eye and I didn't have to strain my neck to look up at you. Now I'm the one looking up at all of you! In the blink of an eye each of you have begun that miraculous transformation from childhood to manhood and womanhood. You are no longer the little kids who cuddled up to your mom and dad in church or skipped up the aisle to receive communion. We are here this morning to mark an important rite of passage in your lives and to pray for you and your parents (maybe especially your parents!!) as you set out on your life's adventure.

There are similarities to your experience on this occasion as the one found in Luke's story of twelve-year old Jesus. This account is a little gem because it is the only story in all the Bible that gives us a glimpse into Jesus' childhood. After a week-long Passover celebration among thousands of other pilgrims in the big city of Jerusalem Joseph, Mary, Jesus and the rest of the family head home, not by high-speed train or even car, but on foot or if they were really lucky by donkey. In the midst of their travels Mary and Joseph realize Jesus is not with the group. After a weary and anxiety-filled night they find him in the Temple deeply engrossed in conversation with the Temple teachers. Luke says that they are impressed by Jesus, his inquisitiveness and knowledge and even maturity. Now Mary and Joseph don't see things in the same way the Temple teachers do.

Just like Jesus, you are pushing the boundaries and testing your parents' every last nerve. And it's exactly what you should be doing! You are stepping out more on your own, obtaining a greater sense of independence while also assuming greater

responsibility. Your primary task over the better part of the next decade is to step out over and over again into unknown places, asking questions, seeing what you discover about yourself and the world around you and your place within it. "Who has God created me to be?" "What are my God-given gifts and how am I to use them for the sake of the world? These are some of the questions you must ask of yourself. And just when you think you've figured out the answer you must find yourself on a new path in your journey and must start again. I realize that at this moment it might be hard for you to imagine that there is anything you don't know or can't anticipate. But I invite you to be open to the unexpected twists and turns, challenges and blessings which will surprise you along the way because it's when you get lost that your journey becomes interesting.

If I'm honest with you, this work of discovery does not end with your teenage years. At forty-six I'm still trying to figure out who I am and where I'm headed! This is an important part of what it means to be an adult, to acknowledge that there's always more room to grow, more opportunities to discover your identity and purpose in the world. The journey never really ends, but only continues to change us. This leads me to my next point. Stay curious. Be open to the unknown. Never stop asking the questions. Even the really hard ones. Even the ones that don't have any answers. Never stop being a seeker. One of the things you come to learn with age is that there is so much you don't know. We need curious young people in our world today, unafraid to explore doing things in different ways. And we need young people who are also willing to be bold and brave, to be willing to stand at the threshold of something new and to begin all over again. I pray that you will be brave now at age 13, but also at age 20 and 46 and at 98.

And when you do find yourself a little scared and unsure and confused, (and trust me, you will), please remember that you are not alone, your parents and I and members of your church community will be there, not to walk the journey for you, but to walk beside you, maybe sometimes running behind to catch up to you, as you figure out which way to go next. And when you do step out in faith and courage striving to discover who you have been created to be in this world, I hope that you will find God in your midst. I believe that God will meet you in the struggles and the mistakes, when you make a wrong turn and don't know where you are headed. God will meet you when you think you've arrived at your destination only to find out there's another fork

in the road. And God will meet you at the finish line rejoicing with you when you have finally achieved what you've been striving for and then invite you again on a new course to travel, a new adventure on which to embark. That unconditional, divine love that was there when you took your first breath will be there all along the way, strengthening and upholding and empowering you to embrace your own unique path in life.

Parents of Ethan, Meg, Eli and Xavier, you also need to be reminded that you are not alone on this day. This letting go of your children and entrusting them to the journey that lies ahead is one of the hardest and most important things you'll ever do as a parent. We commend you for your work and we pray for you. One of the best parenting books I ever read is entitled *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, written by Wendy Mogel, a psychologist and Jewish mother. In it she states "Jewish wisdom holds that our children don't belong to us. They are both a loan and gift from God, and the gift has strings attached. Our job is to raise our children to leave us. Our children's job is to find their own path in life." This is no less true for us Christian parents, as well. We gather here, your parish family, to honor not only your beautiful, independent, inquisitive and infuriating teenagers, but also to honor each of you and the work you're doing to raise them to leave you and find their own path in life. It's as exciting and scary for you as it is for them. But trust that as you are letting go, allowing them to discover their own identity and purpose, there will be others who have been placed on their journey to support them. And they will serve as witnesses to the marvelous gifts and talents your children possess and the marvelous opportunities that lay before them, helping your children and you envision all the possibilities.

Meg, Xavier, Ethan and Eli, you may not fully believe it or understand it. But God has been preparing you for this journey. God has made you for this journey. And like all of us gathered here God can't wait to marvel at what you will do with your God-given gifts and how you will share them with our world. A religious thinker once said, "that the young—at whatever age—are the ones who have not unlearned what it means 'to begin.'" God's great desire for all of us is to discover and rediscover throughout our lives who we are created to be and what we are created for. As witnesses to these young people's Rite-13 ceremony, God is inviting us all this day to be bold and brave and curious, keeping our hearts open for when we are being called to step out in faith and

begin again, trusting that somehow when we do step out we too will grow in spirit, blessed both by God and by community. *Amen.*