

Rite-13 & 14 Ceremony
October 11, 2020
The Rev'd. Emily Richards

Blessed by God and Community

After all the planning and preparing and yes, ALL the waiting ... his day has finally arrived, for you Samantha, Harrison, Maggie and Colleen!! It is a great day! Certainly, one you will not soon forget -as we mark this occasion in the time of COVID. Even masked and physically distanced with many of your family and members of your church community participating online, we have all gathered virtually or in-person to celebrate your journey to adulthood. It is a particularly special moment for me because I stand before you as both a priest and a parent. Part of my preparation for your ceremony, was a trip down memory lane while choosing pictures to be included in the slideshow PJ has created. The pictures, Maggie, tell a beautiful story of you being raised in this community of faith, a place that I hope you will always call your home. And it's home for all four of you. Not only did I come across an image of Maggie's first time serving as an acolyte at the Maundy Thursday service, but of Colleen's big moment as Mary in the Christmas pageant, of Harrison hugging his beloved Rufus at our St. Francis celebration and of Samantha giving her children's sabbath sermon on the Pentecost fire!! In the blink of an eye each of you have begun that miraculous transformation from childhood to adulthood. We are here this morning to give thanks to God for this rite of passage in your lives and to pray for you and your parents (maybe especially your parents!!) as you set out on this great adventure.

In the Gospel story from Luke we hear a little of Jesus' own adolescent adventure. 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, 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, 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 venture into unknown places, asking questions, seeing what you discover about yourself, 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?"

Bishop Steven Charleston puts it this way: "We are all, each in our own way, agents of God's grace. Every day we are given an opportunity to live out that calling, to be a source of mercy or healing or hope for another human being, perhaps even for many people, or even for the Earth we share with every living creature. Our acts, great and small, matter. They are the endless string of grace that encircles our world like a necklace of light. The choices we make, the things we do, turn the wheel of blessing, bringing goodness into being, kindness into life." I have no doubt that each of you will be agents of grace and goodness and hope. Your job is to figure out what that will look like for you!

So, 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, to strive for a more just and peaceful world.

When you do find yourself a little scared and unsure, (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. While Mary and Joseph were half out of their minds looking for their twelve-year-old son, Jesus was safe within his faith community, learning and growing among his elders who cared about him and the person he was becoming. 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.

Fellow parents, you also need to be reminded that you are not alone on this day. Entrusting your precious children to the journey that lies ahead is one of the hardest and most important things you'll ever do as a parent. Your parish family honors not only your beautiful, independent, inquisitive and sometimes infuriating teenagers, but also each of you and the work you're doing to raise them to 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.

Colleen, Maggie, Samantha and Harrison, you may not fully believe it or understand it. But I'm here to tell you that God has been preparing you for this journey. God has made you for it. And like us parents, family members and church friends, 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-13/14 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.*