

**Senior Recognition**  
**John 14:15-21**  
**Rev. Joy Laughridge**  
**May 10, 2026**

This fall when we were doing Alpha, one of the last videos was about church and there was a chance for the students to talk about what their experience of church has been if they'd been part of a church. I was so happy that night when three of our seniors spoke up and said that church- and specifically this church- has been a positive experience for them. I felt deeply grateful to God, but also proud of this congregation for your authentic and faithful discipleship and for the ways you have fulfilled the vow you made to these students at their baptism to teach them about Jesus and nurture their faith. Being part of a church *should* be a positive experience. It isn't always for everyone, but you have shown these students that it can be, and that is a wonderful blessing.

On a personal note, I also want to say as the mother of one of these seniors with another who is still growing up at home, that I am profoundly thankful to God for each of you and for the ways you have shown Christ's love to our family over these last eight years.

We've already heard from some of our seniors, but I want to return to our Gospel reading for a moment and listen together for what Jesus might say to us on this special day. Our seniors are on the brink of new beginnings as they start college, or new jobs, and move away from home – some of them. It's a very exciting time, but, seniors, some things about life as you've known it for the last 18 years are about to change, and that can be a little scary.

In this passage from John, Jesus was talking to his disciples when one season in their lives was drawing to a close and a new one was about to open. They'd been with Jesus for three years- eating,

sleeping, serving alongside him, learning from him - and soon he was going to be taken from them. After his death and resurrection, he would still be their leader, and they would still be his followers, but he wouldn't be physically present with them. Even with that change coming, God had things in store for their lives that they couldn't even imagine.

As Jesus talked with his disciples on that night in the Upper Room, he was preparing them to keep going on the path they'd started down when they first responded to his call and became his followers. Just because some things were going to change, it didn't mean that their relationship with Jesus was coming to an end, and it didn't mean that they should just forget everything they'd learned from Jesus as if it would no longer be relevant to their lives. Seniors, the same thing is true for you, too. Though your lives are going to change in different ways, Jesus wants and means for your relationship with him that has been established and nourished during your years growing up at home and in this church to keep going and growing.

Think for a minute about the movie Toy Story 3. When Andy was ready to go to college, he packed up his toys and planned to store them in the attic while he went off to his new adventures. They would be there when he got back, he thought, and you might think the same thing about Jesus. Plenty of young people do, I'm sure, but Jesus is speaking today through our Gospel text to let you know that he wants to go with you. There is more love, and truth, and grace that he wants to show you. There is more personal growth and transformation that he has planned for you. There are more people that he wants to bless, and more good that he wants to accomplish in this world through you, and like Andy's toys, he isn't going to be content with being kept in storage. Remember? Those toys were on a mission to get back to Andy because they loved him and they knew that he had loved them.

Jesus doesn't want to stay packed away in the attic of your childhood. He wants to go with you into this next season of your life.

Now he won't harass you, or force himself on you. That's not his way, but he will be there, offering grace, loving you always, and ready to help you. This is what Jesus told the disciples when he promised to send them the Advocate who would be with them forever. He wasn't abandoning them or leaving them to figure things out on their own. In the Holy Spirit, he was going to be close – reminding them of what he had taught them, showing them the way, empowering them to be his faithful followers and witnesses. The same promise he made to his disciples is the promise that he makes to you, seniors, and to all of us.

Jesus told his disciples that he wouldn't leave them alone, and the other thing that Jesus speaks about in this passage is his disciples' love for him. If you love me, he says, you will keep my commandments. When you hear that, you might focus in on the keeping my commandments part, and you might hear that as Jesus saying to you, "be good." He does care about how we behave and he does want us to listen to him and keep his commandments because keeping his commandments is good for us, but it's important that we pay attention to the order of Jesus's words there. He begins with love, not with being good. He is saying, focus on loving me, and the following my commandments part will flow naturally out of that. Love Jesus first and you will find that the other things in life have a way of falling into place as they should.

Seniors, if you've learned nothing else from your time in church, I hope that you have learned that Jesus loves you, and because he loves us, we are free to love him. His love for you will not change, and because his love for you never changes, you will always be free to respond to his love by loving him no matter where you are, who you're with, or what you're doing. No matter where life takes you, your

relationship with Jesus remains available to you. So, keep learning about his love for you, and keep loving him with all your heart. Stay close to him, and he will be an anchor for your life in every season. Amen.

