

New York Theological Seminary Commencement Service
May 16, 2015
Charge from President Dale T. Irvin

We have come to the end of another academic year, another graduation service, another outstanding NYTS Class.

Class of 2015: congratulations one more time.

And now as you prepare to go out into the world to serve, I want to send you out with a reminder of what you are to be about.

There is a passage in the Talmud that helps to remind us of what you are to be about. Rabbi Chanina once said, "I have learned much from my teachers. I have learned more from my colleagues than my teachers. But I have learned more from my students than from all of them." (*Babylonian Talmud*, "Taanit," 7a)

I can truly say to all of you in the class of 2015 that those of us who have been your teachers have learned much from you over the years that you have journeyed with us. You have been outstanding teachers.

But now it is your time and your task to go out from this place and teach others.

That's right. Teach them.

Because ultimately ministry in whatever form it takes is about teaching.

Did you ever notice that in Matthew 28:18-20 when Jesus was giving the Great Commission to the 11 remaining disciples he told them to go out into all the world and make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them everything he had commanded.

This is no minor point. Matthew has quite a bit to say about preaching, but here at the end of the Gospel, giving his final charge in the form of a Great Commission, Jesus did not say to his disciples to go and preach to all the nations

He said to go and teach them everything he had commanded them to do.

He didn't say go build big churches

He didn't say go make yourself a fine income off the people

He didn't say go find yourself a safe career somewhere

He didn't say go and talk about prosperity

He didn't say play it safe and just give the folks what they want to hear

He said go and teach them everything that I have commanded you

Teach them to hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice
Teach them to be merciful and forgiving
Teach them to be peacemakers
Teach them how to heal the sick, cleanse those considered lepers, and cast out the demons of our era

Teach them to visit the prisons and liberate the captives
Teach them to build new communities with affordable housing instead of luxurious monstrosities in which the rich conspicuously display their wealth

Teach them to raise up the down-caste
Teach them to overturn the tables of inequality
Teach them to love their neighbors
Teach them to end sexism and homophobia and xenophobia

Teach them that Black lives matter

My charge to you this day is go forth from this place ready to teach these things anew in whatever place God is sending you

Teach them in the churches Sunday morning from the pulpit
Teach them in your Bible study classes on Wednesday or Friday evening
Teach them in the synagogue or temple or masjid
Teach them when you are carrying out your calling as a hospital chaplain in the palliative care unit

Teach them in the public schools where you work
Teach them as a case manager for the city agency that you serve
Teach them on Wall Street
Teach them on Bedford Avenue
Teach them on the Grand Concourse
Teach them on Beach Channel Drive

Teach them in the cities
Teach them in the suburbs
Teach them on the highways and teach them on the byways

Teach them wherever you go
Teach people in the congregation a new way of being church
Teach everyone you meet a new way of being a people
Teach what you have learned
Teach what you have already taught

Go forth from this place into all the world, teaching all things that you have been commanded by the one who has reminded us that God is still at work in our world,

Raising up a new generation of teachers and leaders who are builders of God's new creation.

And may the God who taught us go before and with us as we go forth from this place, teaching the word, teaching the world.

Amen.