

“Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; so God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them [and] God blessed them [and] God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

(n \_\_n), this morning your parents and family members, your Rite-13 mentors and the whole of our church community gathers together to celebrate you and to give thanks for you – to give thanks for your “created-ness” – for the unique and wonderful young men and women that you have become. And we hope to remind you – lest you ever forget – when, in a few moments you participate in your Rite-13 Ceremony, we all hope to remind you that God looks upon each of you, with all of your differences – all of your different ways of being – with all of the gifts and the talents that each one of you possesses – God looks upon each one of you and says “good” – “very, very good.”

It is important, therefore, to remember that your “created-ness” – your giftedness is not anything you ever have to prove to anyone. It is not something that you can screw up – it’s not something that can be taken away from you - it is not even something that you can manage to remove if you wanted to – you cannot change this fundamental goodness that is in you by anything that you have ever done or will ever do in life - now on occasion, your parents or your teachers in school might disagree with me that point but, you can always remind them in those moments that you are, before all else “good” for you all carry within you, as created beings, the divine imprint of your Creator – you all, in your own ways – in wonderful ways, make God’s presence known, not only to your parents and to your friends but to everyone that meets you. You are not only a gift to us here at Christ Church, but, by simply being who you are – by being who you have been created to be, you are also very much a gift to the whole world.

Now you all know, of course, (at least I hope you know) that you still have some growing up to do, and very many adults do to, – but the core of who you are, of who God has especially created you to be, will in many ways remain the same no matter what grades you get in school or where you go to college or what you end of doing for a living or how much money you ever make – no matter the joys or the challenges of life and for that we celebrate today and we give thanks to God for each of you.

And yet, your “created-ness” – our “created-ness” - does also come with some measure of responsibility – with some acknowledgment that within you lies a deep well of potential – within you lies the capacity to change the world around you for the better.

Last night, at the dinner we had here in your honor, many of your parents got and spoke very movingly about how very thankful they were for each of you and how thankful they were that you felt safe and felt free to doubt – to question - to make up your mind about God and to make up your mind about what exactly you think or feel about any number of things. And that freedom to choose and to doubt and to question is also an important part of your “created-ness” that we all celebrate and give thanks for today but I hope also that you never forget that, no matter what you believe, you all have it within you to seek out and find ways to do just what Jesus did in his life as young person in the world – you all

have it within you to seek out and to find ways to feed the poor or heal the sick or to call people's attention to the needs and concerns of the weakest and most marginalized in our society – the homeless, the hopeless, the least and the lost. Now the way you each might approach that great need in the world, using the unique gifts and talents that you have been given, will most certainly be different, but you have all been given that same gift – the gift to be able to help – to be able to commit yourself to something greater **than** yourself – to move beyond yourself and to connect up with others.

And so, “finally brothers and sisters,” as St. Paul writes in our letter to the Corinthians this morning, “live in peace [with one another] and the God of love and peace will be with you.”

In other words, perhaps the best part of our “created-ness” is that we were not created to be alone – that we all have one another – that we have all been created to be with one another and, as such, God is most often made real for us when we reach beyond ourselves and realize the great community of people that is always around us.

You are a gift to us – each one of you - but I hope and pray today that you also know and always remember that there are many people ready to love and support you – many people here praying for you – not just your family or your friends but all of us in this church community.

You help us to find the heart of God.

I hope, with God's grace, that we also can manage to do the same for you.

AMEN.