

Dear Friends

If you are a person who looks forward to annual events, then this is proving to be a disappointing year. The many summer festivals we enjoy in this province, the Folk Festival, Jazz, Fringe, Folklorama, not to mention the many wonderful small town events, are for the most part now being cancelled. Annual events, much like annual holidays, seem perfectly spaced. One year feels like just the right amount of time between cherishing the memories the past one and eager anticipation of the next one. We will miss our annual favorites but they will return and be more appreciated than ever.

However, singular events are being cancelled and it isn't a question of simply waiting for next year. I am thinking especially about the young people of our community who are graduating from high school, college, and university during a pandemic. An event that they have every right to look forward to with great excitement, something that they have worked for, earned, and deserved, yet the right to celebrate is going to be denied them. I heard a young woman on the radio lovingly describe the dress she bought in September but will not get to wear to her grad ceremony or dinner. It was a little heartbreaking.

If you are among the group of graduates in this situation, or if someone in your family is, please know that this community of faith thinks the world of you. You are being asked to make a sacrifice that no one saw coming. You are living a moment that has a rich and long tradition of being celebrated but that has been taken away for the sake of the health and well-being of us all. We are proud both of your achievements and the stunning maturity with which you have collectively faced this untimely hour.

My son is in such a position. He has worked so very hard to complete the program at Red River College from which he is graduating this spring. It has been inspiring to see the effort he put into his studies and I know an amazing future awaits him. But we would have welcomed the opportunity to sit in a hall, and wait for his name to be called, to see him take his turn crossing the dais, and later make him pose for pictures in every possible combination of friends and family. We will celebrate with him but it will be in a much quieter and more intimate manner.

Ancient Israel knew the innate value of marking time. The Sabbath was instituted not only as a day of rest, but as an acknowledgement that time is our servant and not our master. The Torah also calls for the seventh-year fallow of the land and the forty-ninth-year jubilee for the forgiveness of debt. The ancients also introduced festivals and annual events so that the past, present, and future could live together in our observances. This is a time to dance but the music has been stilled.

This moment may be passing by our young graduates in some ways, but they will prove to be a great generation. We rejoice in their accomplishments, send them our love, and pray for blessing in their next endeavor.

Grace and peace,

Michael