

“SUNRISE, SUNSET”

Psalm 146

© by **The Rev. Ms. Laurie A. McNeill**
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Graduate Sunday

*Is this the little girl I carried?
Is this the little boy at play?
I don't remember growing older,
When did they?*

*When did she get to be a beauty?
When did he grow to be so tall?
Wasn't it yesterday when they were small?*

*Sunrise sunset, sunrise, sunset,
Swiftly flow the days,
Seedlings turn overnight to sunflowers,
Blossoming even as they gaze...*

*Sunrise sunset, sunrise, sunset!
Swiftly fly the years,
One season following another,
Laden with happiness and tears.*

The students in Marlboro are familiar with the lyrics to “Sunrise, Sunset.” *Fiddler on the Roof* was their final production this spring. Today, as we celebrate our graduates, many an adult is wondering when it was that these young people grew older. It seems like yesterday when these youth were baptized as infants. It seems like yesterday when they made their confirmations.

For Matt and Karrington and Carly, it seems like they just graduated from high school. How is it that they now have graduated from college?

Wasn't it just yesterday that Shelby was folded into a car seat and driven to her grandparents for a visit?

These are poignant days for our families. The day in/day out, demanding work of caregivers is drawing to a close. Care, concern and counsel will continue from a

distance. Parental input will be restrained out of respect for the emerging independence of sons and daughters.

As tender a time as this is, it also is a time of relief. You young people have been a pain! For the past few years you have been the source of sleepless nights, perpetual worry, and intermittent frustration. There is a bit of relief that you will be taking your attitudinal moodiness off to college and graduate school and, at long last, employment!

Yes, this is a time that is laden with happiness and tears. Whether we like it or not, we are confronted with the swiftness of our lives.

Sunrise, sunset. Swiftly flow the days.

Sunrise, sunset. Swiftly fly the years.

We are unable to stop the hands from sweeping around a clock. We cannot keep the earth from circling the sun. Young or old, rich or poor — we cannot make ourselves immortal.

We are not alone in acknowledging our awe at the passage of time and the preciousness of life.

The ancient psalmist knows that life is fast fleeting and that reality cannot be changed, not even by those with privilege and power. We are given this advice by our ancient biblical writer:

Do not put your trust in princes,

in mortals, in whom there is no help.

When their breath departs, they return to the earth;

on that very day their plans perish. (Psalm 146:3-4)

We are to be realistic about human limitations, yet we need not be depressed by human mortality. Instead, we may rejoice that there is One who is immortal.

That is why we echo the words of the psalmist: *Praise the Lord! (Psalm 146:1)* We praise the One upon whom we may rely, forever.

We place our trust in the Creator of the sun that rises and sets. We put our trust in the One who reigns forever. We place our trust in the One who sustains us in our time on earth and receives us into heaven.

We put our trust in God — or, we don't. We may doubt God's power. We may not believe that God is faithful. We may not even believe there is a God.

The Lord does not coerce us to be in relationship. We are encouraged to be active in our faith, but we have the freedom to do as we please.

Our young people will never have more freedom than they do right now. Our high school graduates are free from the burden of having to provide their own healthcare or housing. They do not have to completely support themselves — they are aided by their families.

Our college graduates are not married and they are not raising children. They do not have to provide care for aging parents, although their parents have aged while making tuition payments.

The Class of '16 has enormous freedom — including the freedom to turn their backs on God. Just as they may turn away from God, they also may turn toward God. They may rely on God. They may serve God. They may put their trust in God. They may strengthen their relationship with God, as may we all.

We have the freedom to live our lives in allegiance to our Lord. It is as if we are making a pledge of allegiance when we say, "*Praise the Lord!*"

With that phrase, we are saying that God is more important to us than anything or anyone else in the world. "*Praise the Lord!*"

God is more important than our nationality.

God is more important than our possessions.

God is more important than our family and friends.

Nations will cease to exist.

Possessions may slip from our grasp.

Loved ones will die, but the Lord is with us forever!

"*Praise the Lord!*" — this is the message we have shared with our children since the day they were baptized. From their earliest years we have emphasized what is crucial for their well-being.

Ardis Ketterer reminded me of the way we influence children at an early age with beliefs about their allegiances.

Ardis said that when she was in Texas visiting her family last month she accompanied her granddaughter to Kindergarten. The morning began with the children standing, turning toward the American flag, placing their hands over their hearts and saying the pledge to the flag.

Immediately after the Kindergarteners pledged their allegiance to the United States of America, they then said another pledge directed toward the state flag. Even at the age of 5, little Alicia pledges her allegiance to the state of Texas.

"*Praise the Lord!*" is our pledge of allegiance to God.

Here at the First Presbyterian Church of Highland/Marlboro, we have taught our children to *Praise the Lord!* We have instructed them that the allegiance of Christians is first and foremost to God.

We hope that our young adults recognize that our relationship with God helps us sort out the complexities of life.

Social relationships have integrity when guided by the law of love as established in Scripture. Biblical teachings tilt economic realities toward justice. Jesus called for a *Moral Revolution* long before President Obama, as he did when he recently visited Hiroshima, Japan.

Our relationship with God helps us sort out the complexities of life.

Our young people are at the sunrise of their freedom as adults. May they, in their freedom, dare to believe that their lives are well spent in service to our Lord. May we, who are in the sunset of our lives, dare to believe the same. Let us all *Praise the Lord!*

Amen.