

I had a strange "something's changed" moment the other day. I was talking to a friend and casually remarked that my boys were finishing school this week and that Owen would have graduated from GRCHS next Tuesday. "Next Tuesday." It hit me like a slap to the face. How could that date, which had been proudly displayed on every paper and digital calendar in our house for months now, finally be "next Tuesday"?

I'm guessing many of you have also experienced poignant "something's changed" moments over these last two months. Of course, this global pandemic has made us want to cry out, "Everything has changed!" But as time goes on, we notice changes amidst the changes. They aren't necessarily bad. Or good. Just different.

While I felt "next Tuesday" like a cold slap, I was more struck by how little emotion accompanied it. I've cried many (many!) tears in the past two months about many things, and certainly for Owen and all the graduates out there. But I didn't feel a single tear welling when "next Tuesday" hit me during that conversation. Why? Shouldn't I feel even more sadness now as that long-anticipated day quickly approaches? My first response was to see it as a work of the Spirit, the gift of peace that passes all human understanding. The Lord has promised us His peace. We have prayed for that peace. Then, of course, there is the passing of time. Sadness is still sadness long after it first hits us, but time can make it less raw and painful. The gift of peace is working through the passing of time as well.

But what has hit me as strange is how my mind simply can't envision a high school commencement any longer. We've been in this new reality long enough now that I have no reference for what it would feel like to gear up for all those special senior year events. Our lockdown lifestyle is the norm. Those celebrations don't even seem like possibilities now. Because they aren't. But it's hard to even remember that they once were. Strange. And sad in its own way – almost like a "double" loss. But it's a changed sadness. It's more of a resigned and peaceful sadness. It doesn't hurt as much because it's found refuge in the peace only our Lord can give – that place I can always come home to and find rest. For He never changes.

These were words I included with Owen's graduation announcements, but I offer them to all of Fifth's 2020 graduates:

Thank you for all your good work that led you to this moment. We know this is not the end to your senior year you expected. Thank for sharing your gifts at home, at school, at church, and throughout the community. We pray that you will continue to do so. None of us will emerge from this global crisis unchanged. As much as we want our lives back as they were, what we most want for you has not changed: that you would act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with the Lord.

I am sure my emotions about "next Tuesday" (and all the subsequent "nexts") will continue to change as days come and go. This present sense of emotional detachment and resignation may very well give way to heavy tears again on Monday when I think to myself, "He would have graduated tomorrow". I don't know how I'll feel on that should-have-been commencement night. I suspect it will be that blend of many emotions that we so often call "bittersweet". I was likely to feel that anyway. Pandemic or not, I've been told parents of graduates often cry!

Life changes around us. We change with it. And then we change again. And again. How great is our need for a rock, a sure foundation, an "anchor that holds within the veil":

*His oath, his covenant, his blood
support me in the whelming flood;
when all around my soul gives way,
he then is all my hope and stay.*

*On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
all other ground is sinking sand.*