

Jeff's Jottings

The classiest of 2018

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It's graduation season. I will be in Santa Clara University's soccer stadium on Saturday morning for the graduation of my daughter Paige. I could not be more proud of her perseverance, her commitment, her beautiful spirit.

Like every parent there, I'll scan the sea of maroon caps and gowns, each one exactly like the other (save for the ones who decorated their caps) looking for Paige. From behind, faces hidden from view, they all look the same, until their name is called, and they walk across that stage, and suddenly that remarkable sameness isn't anymore.

There never was that sameness, of course, but the transformation is still remarkable. There's the Harvard grad student, and the Starbucks barista. The one who will live in a studio apartment next to the one who will buy a mansion. The one who will make millions, and the one who'll lose everything to a con. The one who will marry, the one who will stay single. The parent, the single parent, the two who will weep at their inability to become parents. The one who will run a food pantry and the one who will need it. A counselor. A friend to assuage their grief. Divorced. Addicted. Incarcerated. Fired. Downsized. Forced to leave a job. Teach for America and taught life's hard lessons.

The problem is, of course, we don't know which one is that one. We guess sometimes, and sometimes we'll be right. But today we don't know; the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said life can only be understood backwards but it must be lived forward.

But if we can't know the future, we can know who holds the future, and thus we know this: each graduate who walks across a stage this spring is a beloved child of God. And because each one is a child of God, each is valued; each is gifted; each called, each loved.

I don't have much advice for graduates, which is good; there's plenty of that going around. What I have is but a simple hope and promise: that living life forward is built not on educational qualifications, or job status, or bank accounts; not on what you or I will do or earn or believe or any other descriptor; but on who God is — the One who gives us life and comforts us in trials, in all of our days.