



BRIDGING SUNDAY

**Celebrating our graduating seniors
and coming of age youth**

SUNDAY, MAY 17 | REV. T. J. FITZGERALD IS PREACHING

You know when you really become an adult in this church? When you sit through two services on a Sunday. That's the test they don't tell you about, but you guys are doing a great job. Not that there's any other services but this service for you. In fact, the first Unitarian service I ever went to was a bridging service, was one like this. And the honesty I heard of that service coming from the chancel, the bear telling of faith in the future, faith in family and faith in nothing at all in one guy's case was pretty stunning. But that's all still with me. It stuck with me. And so that's why it's a really great honor today to just pause in this so busy time, I know, in the lives of these young people and in the lives of all of their families and all of their loved ones too, to pause to take in what's really happening right now to each of you of course, but really to each of us.

How are y'all doing? Almost made it through. You're almost there, I promise. Whether you're scared or happy or a little bored, all of those things are preparing you for this future that you're about to lead. So it's good. See, for me personally, this is actually my first class of seniors that I saw bridge from Odyssey to UU since I've been here at the church. So it's a real honor to get to do this service with you all. The other ministers have seen generations and generations come, but this is my first ... No, no, no. I'm counting generations in a year, not 20. But you're my first so I'm glad. So it helps me also to realize how much has happened even in my own life and maybe in yours as well, how much change has taken place.

And that's the thing about marking time about services or events like this one. As much as we get to honor those who are growing and changing, we recognize in our own lives too how much has changed, how much is happening around us. In young lives for the past few years changes are happening all the time. And especially in the last few years, these changes seem to be happening at a pace that to many

of us seem strange and otherworldly. But we have to remember that for our young people, this is what they've known. This rate of change is what they're used to. It's what they've come to expect. It's normal. It's what's on the menu day to day. Whether we're older and we maybe take these things for granted or maybe we were part of a time that we're keeping things in place, no matter who we are, whatever age we are, things are changing fast.

One change that many of us witnessed together in 2022 was ... I was reminded about on Tuesday. I went over to SMU to hear Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson speak. She's the first black woman on the Supreme Court and she talked about her experiences of becoming a judge on that court. The first story she told or one of the first stories was about when she left high school and went to college. She had grown up in Miami and she was spending her first year of college way up north. And it was the second week of school and it was her birthday, but she hadn't really met anyone yet and didn't really know anyone. So she was pretty sad celebrating alone and missing her family. And since she was very, very sad, but she was from Miami, so being up north, she was also very, very cold, which is a very hard combination.

And on one afternoon she was walking down the street looking, she said, pretty sad herself when she passed another black woman on the street. And when Justice Jackson passed this woman, she explained, the woman leaned down close to her, didn't stop, and just whispered close to her ear, and kept walking, the word persevere. Justice Jackson said that she felt that this woman was a divine presence or a messenger in her life. She even called her an angel maybe that helped her in that moment to handle the homesickness and the cold perhaps also up in the north. It wasn't easy. Persevering was hard, she said. But not long after that, she made a group of friends, of comrades that she's still close with even today. She persevered. Words of wisdom like this from a Supreme Court justice or maybe from your parents, maybe from your minister or other elders I know can be a comfort, but like that experience, they can also be a great challenge as well.

A member of this very community who taught at SMU for more than three decades became known for his words of wisdom that he shared at the end of every class he taught at SMU, called his benediction. His name is Charles Hosch. He's a lawyer and an educator and one of the most respected attorneys in all of Dallas and he has been missing for months. Yeah. The search for Charles has been in national news in case you didn't know. His family and his other loved ones have been greatly pained by his disappearance after going for a hike one afternoon in Georgia.

Though we can't find Charles, I think we can all benefit from some of the words that he has honed over the last three decades to share with his classes that he calls his benediction. His family gave me permission to adapt these words today just for you and for all of you as well, in case you're listening too. From his context of speaking to new lawyers, granted. And so now he is speaking to you all to make this transition from being an adult into the world, and also to those of you finishing high school going out into new adventures.

Here is his benediction. First, he says, "Develop a work-life balance. Work-life balance is measured over lifetimes. You'll have many different ambitions in life. They'll change as you grow. It's okay to

zero in on different ambitions at different stages of life. But balance requires hard compromises. You can't be perfect at everything." I'm going to say that again for everyone. You can't be perfect at everything. Okay. Hillary Clinton used to say, "Career, family, social life. Pick two." "And you must prioritize family. Screw that up and nothing else will matter," he says.

Second, concentrate in real time. Do what you are doing. We are sold a false bill of goods that we can do many things all at once. It may be true, but if you do that, you won't be doing any of them well. Do what you were doing at this moment. Be present in your task, including especially when that task is being present with another person.

Third, fail well. 90% of anything you will try in life is digging yourself out of the holes you dug yourself into. And while you are failing, note well those people who care more about your struggles than your achievements, your failures more than your triumphs and your courage to keep going more than your grades. Grades are important, but hear me out. These are the people you've got to cultivate in your life for they care about you and not what you can give them.

Fourth, practice integrity. Being who you say you are and doing what you say you'll do. And autonomy, choosing how you will act and respond, not reacting out of reflex or instinct, and this is the important part, 24/7. Acting with integrity and autonomy isn't something you do during work hours or in school or even just with your family. They are a lifelong practice to follow 24/7 for the rest of your life. Are you doing what you say you'll do? Is your word your bond? Does integrity transcend every aspect of your life? If you're in bad company, how are you getting out?

Fifth, grow in endurance. Like Justice Jackson shared, the reminder to stay her course and persevere changed her entire approach to life. Endurance is no different. It's a quality of planning for the long game. To remember that life is a collection of many seasons, some are going to be better than others. And I add beware of the fast and the quick answer or practices that seem like they're too good to be true. Part of endurance is honoring your own pace, going at that pace and honoring your own being. Charles says, "Endurance is what you must have when you cannot have anything else."

Sixth, humility. He says, "To realize that you may not be right." Hear me, church? And this is my addition here. Humility shares a root word with humor, having a sense of humor, and of course with humane, being a humane person in the world. And all of these share a root with the root word for dust or earth to remind us that we are all essentially human and of the earth. Humility is knowing honestly who you are and growing into being more and more yourself throughout your whole life.

And finally, courage. And these are exactly Charles' words now. "I tell you now that brains and hard work are just the table stakes. Starting now, you must also have courage. Courage to have humility not to be too sure you're right, to listen to all sides and to remember that the fact that you may be wrong is the very spirit of liberty. Courage, having listened to change your mind, courage where you see corruption to sacrifice money and status in order to fight it, to turn down offers or leave places where the rot has become evident or embedded and do whatever else it takes to avoid becoming complicit in it. Courage where you see ignorance to suffer the consequences of speaking the truth in

its face. Courage when you seek cruelty to use every ounce of your strength and your brain and your voice to stop it. And courage starting now.

To define yourself and live by a new model of success, not one defined by others, not by grades, not by prestige or moral acceptance within the herd. Courage and the pursuit of substantive excellence. Get really good at what you are doing no matter what it is. But excellence, he says is just the start. Excellence in a life of service," and here's the final key, "at something worth doing." Now, what's worth doing, people? People. People are the only thing that matter very much in this world. So when you put them together, you have this, the pursuit of excellence in a life of service to others. Or as he puts it, "Help other people as best you can for as long as you can."

This is me now. I can't know the pain of the Hosch family or the pain in the hearts of all who love Charles and his family knowing that he's lost. But know this. When you are lost or when you are afraid, if in the forest of life the trees are all that you can see and it's hard to find your way out or your way home, let these words guide you home to the loving and the tender person this church prays always you will be. To the thoughtful champion for the right and for the good that we know you can each be and to the original blessing your very life is to us, to your family and to this world.

You can forget everything else I said here twice today, you may already have, but remember this, you are a blessing. Your whole self is a blessing, every dang part of it. And in this spirit and in the spirit of those like this church who love you so well, I offer you one last time Charles' benediction. Help other people as best as you can for as long as you can. May it ever be so. Bless you all and amen.