

# ConGRADulations

*Matthew 28:16-20*

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The reformer, Martin Luther said, *"To try to deny the Trinity endangers your salvation, to try to comprehend the Trinity endangers your sanity."* ☒ He also said about the Trinity, *"I don't understand it one bit, rather I experience it."* So, on this Trinity Sunday, let's not endanger our sanity, rather, let's experience it. ☒

Whether you're graduating from PreSchool or Grad School or any graduation between, we want to congratulate you. Specifically today we want to congratulate our 10 HS graduates. May you and your loved ones be *"happy together,"* as Toni read earlier, *"waiting to see what would happen next."*<sup>1</sup> As you peer out that window, we want to call on the deep-seated memories of your youth when those butterflies were magical. We're going to have a lil fun recalling an age-old parable, so watch closely because I am not going to use any words. Let's see how long it takes you to figure the parable out. Ready?

***"The itsy bitsy spider climbed up the garden spout. Down came the rain and washed the spider out. Out came the sun and dried up all the rain and the itsy bitsy spider climber up the spout again."***

In that parable<sup>2</sup> is much of what you will ever need to know about being successful. First, don't be afraid to attempt the unfamiliar – the spider climbed up the garden spout. Have you ever thought about it? Long, dark unfamiliar, and uncertain. Only the hope that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. And, just about the time you have made it, down comes the rain and washed you out. Life is tough like that. As hard as you work sometimes, disaster happens, bad luck and difficulty. Did the spider give up, forget about his goal? Of course not. The sun came out and dried up all the rain and darn if that little spider didn't climb up the spout again. Determination, a positive attitude, hard work, vision, staying focused on the goal – if you do that enough, the sun is going to shine and things will go your way. And it is not luck. It's preparation, and its perseverance, and it's the knowledge, it's the absolute confidence that you can and will succeed, and if you pursue something long enough, the sun will shine.

You know what else I like about that story? Not only does everybody know the words to it, we know the hand motions. Every one of us learned that parable as a child. Our parents and our parents' parents and their parents' parents perhaps worked with our teachers and principals and ministers and all the other figures of learning and authority in our society to see that in some small subconscious way we learned that song.

And guess what? You just experienced the Trinity in one lil parable. Who created the spider? God. Who redeemed the spider? The Son (pun intended) came out and dried up all the rain. And what gave the spider the impetus to climb up the spout again? God's Spirit.

That's what I wish my teachers, parents, coaches, ministers would have told me when I graduated from High School, or college or grad school or seminary. Sure, they all told me to have a goal and pursue it. But the mindset was that hard work determines success. Just work hard David, and it will all work out. Well let me tell you, hard work didn't get me through heart breaks. Hard work didn't get me through five knee surgeries. Well actually it did, if rehab's anything, it's hard work. But hard work didn't get me through deciding to hang up the cleats from the very sport I had dedicated my entire life to playing. Hard work didn't get me or my family through my parents' divorce or the darkest, loneliness nights of my dad's hospitalizations or their day in and day out struggles with mental illness or addiction. There's only one thing in all heaven and earth that get you through all that and it's not just hard work.

Do I even need to say it? You know it's true. But sometime between when you learned *The Itsy Bitsy Spider* and today, we screwed up. We screwed up by excusing you. We screwed up by saying, well it's ok, you've got practice, or it's ok, you've got to study, or well it's ok, you've got to work. We screwed up by excusing you from the only thing in all heaven and earth that can and will sustain you. The only thing here or there or anywhere that will always be there to pick you up when you get knocked down. The only thing that will get you through adversity. The only thing that will give you the stick-to-it-ive-ness you'll need. The only thing that will give you the confidence to keep moving forward. The only thing that will give you the fortitude to achieve what you were made to achieve.

Stop, look at your parents. Look at them nodding their heads. Look at the tears welling up in their eyes. That's because they know it's true. That's because the only thing we can guarantee you is that nothing is going

to hit you as hard as life. That's because the only thing that's going to get you to the next ConGRADulations, is God.

As I watched your virtual graduation, as I watched your drive by recognition, and as I pray about all graduates, I see a bunch of *Itsy Bitsy Spiders*. Each of you have different spouts to climb. Each of you are now fully aware that nothing is going to hit you as hard as life. Each of you now know that there is only one thing that's going to get you through it all. It's our creator, our architect, our engineer; it's our redeemer, our deliverer, our liberator, it's our sustainer, our guider, our comforter; it's God.

And while there are millions of miracles happening all the time all around us, as Brad Pitt said in his SNL skit of Dr. Anthony Fauci, "***Miracles are wonderful, miracles are great! But they're should be plan A. Even Sully tried to land at the airport first.***"<sup>2</sup> Point is, don't expect a miracle; realize that God does what God does through God's people. So love your parents, your best friends, your siblings, your roommates, your bosses, your colleagues (yes I said love em) and love people who are different, love people who don't have all that you have, and especially love the love of your life that's out there waiting to spend the rest of their lives with you. Why love em? Because God is love. And if they love you, they're of God. And together you can be with God. And together, you'll grow, get stronger, more resilient, you'll get fortified from all the tough times, and we'll be saying ConGRADulations for years to come.

Amen?!

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<sup>1</sup> Henkes, Kevin. *Waiting*. (Green Willow Books 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: WKU President's Office, "UA3/9/5 Commencement Speech - Itsy Bitsy Spider" (1999). WKU Archives Records. Paper 4237. [http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc\\_ua\\_records/4237](http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records/4237)