

Maybe you’ve heard someone, whose kids are all grown up and are now “empty nesters” say something like this: *“I wouldn’t want to be raising kids in this world today. It’s a scary place.”* And then it just so happens that while they’re saying that, your own kids walk up, which means they have to quickly add: *“Since you have kids, keep your kids in school.”*

Is that true? Is this world a scary place? Yes. The sins of violence and greed and immorality make this world a scary place. Is it also true that we should keep our kids in school? Yes. Staying in school is a good idea. Dropping out of school is a bad idea.

But will math and science and reading and social studies prepare our kids for the violence, greed and immorality they’re going to face? Perhaps. Will those classes help our kids when they have to deal with the death of a grandparent, an uncle with cancer, an injury to dad or mom, or themselves? No.

Instead of: *“Keep your kids in school, because this world is a scary place,”* the best thing to say is: *“Keep your kids in God’s Word, because this world is a scary place.”*

Parents, what do you want for your child? Don’t you want them to grow up and have a sense of security? To know that they are loved and valued? To be content and happy? To show respect, gratitude and appreciation? The secret is not to keep your kids in school. The key is to: *“Keep your kids in God’s Word.”*

Tonight, we’re going to use their class verse and the verses around it where Jesus speaks to people who live in a scary world. I’d like for you to commit this phrase to memory: **“First Things First.”** Parents: **First Things First**, so you remember to keep your kids in God’s Word. Graduates: **First Things First**, so you remember to keep yourself in God’s Word.

How do we know that the people Jesus was talking to were scared and worried? You tell me. Jesus told them in v.25: **“Do not worry about your life,”** Jesus asked them in v.27: **“Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”** and in v.28: **“Why do you worry?”** He reminded them in v. 31: **“Do not worry.”** And once more in v.34, in case they forgot: **“Do not worry about tomorrow.”**

Jesus was talking to people who were scared and worried about whether they’d be able to feed their family, or if they’d be able to afford the clothes they needed.

They seemed to forget there was a God in heaven who loved them and promised that he would take care of their physical needs. Their worries made them forget.

Instead of spending so much of their time, energy and money on getting food and clothes, Jesus reminded them: Since **your heavenly Father knows that you need these things**, you can concentrate on **“First Things First!” Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”**

There’s a whole other world out there that’s not scary. It’s God’s world, his kingdom of mercy and grace. First focus on God. Trust your Heavenly Father. He’ll take care of the rest and you’ll be blessed

We’re all very well acquainted with worry and how it tends to lead us away from God. Yet, we still find ourselves thinking: *“I know I shouldn’t be worrying, but I still do.”*

As a graduating 8<sup>th</sup> Grader, you worry about what others think of you ... what high school will be like ... about friends? Did you forget that your God in heaven loves you, and promises to take care of you?

And as a parent, you worry about your kids - their health, their friends, the things they say, the choices they make. Did you forget that your God in

heaven loves you and your children, and that he promises to take care of both of you?

Since God gave us the gift of life when he knit our bodies together inside your moms, we can count on him. He doesn't make something and then toss us in the corner or under the bed and forget about us. If he's given you these great big gifts of body and life, he'll see to it that you have more than enough food to nourish your life and more than enough clothes to cover your body.

It's amazing how quickly worry makes our faith and trust in God wobble. But God forgives us when we worry. And even when we don't seek him first, he still seeks us first.

- He seeks us in the waters of baptism, where he brings us into his royal family and his kingdom of grace.
- He seeks us in the bread and wine of Communion, where he gives us his real body and his real blood and tells us that our forgiveness from him is real.
- He seeks us in his Word, where he teaches us about the cross of his Son. On that cross his only thought was for you, as he died, took your sins away and gave you his righteousness.

Of all the things for God to be thinking about - you were first, and that's a miracle we will never fully understand. He loved you and chose you first before he even made the world. That's why we trust him to take care of us. That's why **"First Things First"** isn't a chore or an inconvenience for us. It is an honor and a privilege.

At St. Paul's Lutheran School, we prepare our students for the scary world in which they live. It's true, the academics here are second to none. St. Paul's graduates are routinely in the top percentage of the high schools they'll eventually graduate from.

At St. Paul's, our students and our teachers are all about **"First Things First!"** **"First Things First"** means we don't need to go searching high and low for our Lord. We know where to look and where he is. He's found in his Word, the Bible.

**"First Things First"** means time spent in God's Word. Daily devotions and Christ Light to learn Bible stories and memorize Bible passages. Weekly chapel services in the gym and weekly worship services here. Even the songs and hymns we sing. The emphasis on Jesus is obvious to anyone who spends even a day here.

You've grown and matured from spiritual infants in the faith. Don't stop! Keep growing in your faith in Jesus, and you will when you keep **"First Things First."**

There's nothing in the world more important than knowing that God loves you and forgives your sins in Jesus Christ. There's nothing that prepares you better for living in this scary world than knowing that.

It is a scary world out there. And what will help you isn't going to be your knowledge of computers or math or science or history. What will help you is the same thing that has helped every single graduating class from St. Paul's for almost 125 years - faith in God's love. Trust in Jesus Christ and his promises.

Maybe you've heard someone, whose kids are all grown up and are now "empty nesters" say something like this: *"Nothing is more important than for my kids to know Jesus. I want my kids to go to heaven - that's my number one job as a parent."*

What's your number one job as a graduate? You got it! **"First Things First!"** **Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness!**