

Reflections for the Class of 2016

Dr. Kenneth Clapp - Baccalaureate Service (May 13, 2016)

Omwake-Dearborn Chapel

Twenty plus years ago, I began something that has become a tradition as a part of this service...that is to share some reflections of the members of the graduation class. Although I start working on this well in advance, I often arrive at graduation week struggling to determine which events or persons to feature in these reflections. Over the years, during this time I have reflected on first impressions formed from meeting students on their recruiting trips, on the dam builders, on parties, some when I was a welcome guest and others where I my presence was not particularly cherished, upon trips to the local jail to get students released into my custody...on one occasion the son of the person preaching the Baccalaureate was among those receiving both my grace and my wrath.

But what shall I choose as reflective of the Class of 2016? Since T.J. Olsen and Tim Buck are walking this year, I could recall an episode from the 2011 June freshman retreat or I could lift up ...

I was pondering this as I sat in the "Our Song, 3" choir program a couple of weeks ago. Then there came the part where R. J. Thornton and Hunter Safrit directed the ensembles they had

put together and rehearsed for this occasion. I was struck by R.J.'s lyrics in the piece, "Even When He Is Silent", based on a quote found on the walls of Auschwitz. " I believe in the sunshine even when I do not see it. I believe in love even when I do not feel it." "I believe in God even when He is silent." As Hunter began conducting the "Jabberwocky" piece, my thoughts quickly shifted to this young upstart in Freshman Seminar whose case I constantly was on because of being absent or not doing assignments, but the even greater memory was of a young man who was brazenly honest in sharing with the class his dreams of becoming a conductor and what he hoped to get out of life. If I read the expressions on people's faces correctly, there were a lot of doubters at that point...but, Hunter, you have made believers out of those doubters. Later in that semester we talked a lot about setting goals, about dreaming about the possibilities and the ways you can make a difference and you can realize your dreams, especially when those dreams pertain to doing good, helping others, making our world a little better than we found it.

Hunter, I believed in you and your classmates and my colleagues seated to your left have believed and will continue to believe in you. As you prepare to go forward from this place we will continue to believe in you, to support you, to pray for you. But it will be important for you to recognize that the learnings, the abilities, the understandings that you take from this place give you reason to believe in yourselves and that will be critical for the next steps in our journey. I also admonish you to believe in God, even when you may think God is not

listening, or hearing or responding...or as the song says, even when God is silent. God will speak to us if we will only open ourselves to listening and hearing and comprehending.

We send into a world that has many problems, many needs, many challenges, but we send you with the preparation to address those needs and problems. Use that preparation to dream of what can be and listen to God as God will guide you in how to move forward to bring about change and make a difference. Believe in yourselves, believe in God and make the difference you can make and realize your dreams for a better world and a better day. I join all of the Catawba community in wishing you Godspeed.