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Chapel Remarks
Old St. Anne's Church
May 19, 2013

It is never easy to write a Chapel talk good enough for the occasion of a spring Chapel service at Old St. Anne's, for this gathering has now established itself as a ritual designed to say goodbye and thanks to each succeeding St. Andrew's graduating class.

St. Andrew's challenge this year has been to define, explore and live a concept of rescue that represents community and education at its best. Throughout our seniors' careers, we have studied the implications of creating meaning in our lives by sharing, sacrificing, honoring and recognizing the essential dignity of the human family. But this year, we sharpened that focus, and we began to ask how students and adults might prepare to create literal and metaphorical ways to connect to the elemental needs of people in the world. The art of rescue moves us from theory to practice; from ignorance to recognition to action.

We have witnessed the art and complexity of rescue through the events that have marked this 2012-13 year. The ravages of Hurricane Sandy, the intolerant and brutal violence against women and women's education in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, the shootings in Newtown, the bombings in Boston created heroic responses that affirmed that human beings are willing to sacrifice everything, every day, when goodness and life are threatened. These public events represent only a tiny fraction of the anguish and suffering caused by natural disasters, violence, war and homicides, but sometimes we need to live through the particular events before comprehending the larger picture. The rescuers in the world need our help, and they need it immediately.

Bishop Wright reminded us Wednesday evening that though we have no say in where we are born and when we are born, we do have the ability and responsibility to respond, to build, to heal, to console, to save and to rescue.

I know you will meet people in your life who have stopped growing, caring, reading, thinking, believing, hoping, feeling and sacrificing. They will embrace the art of cynicism, disdain, bitterness and emptiness over the art of engagement and rescue. This negativity provides a comforting and reassuring lens for a life devoid of commitment, generosity or sacrifice – we can literally close ourselves off from the glory of learning, living and growing by asserting our essential withdrawal from anything larger than a culture that honors cowardice, intoxication, conformity and self-deception.

But as I study the doctrine and presumption of adults who have stopped growing, thinking, feeling; as I listen to cynical people; as I study their lamentations, their presumption, their entitlement, their laziness, the sheer waste of opportunity and human talent and responsibility, I lose my patience and say enough – enough petty, childish

behavior and attitude; enough complacency; enough cowardice; enough worship of selfish and self-destructive gods and goals; enough pretense; enough, enough, enough.

The life of rescue suggests we have no time to spare: we have work to do – work to care for and honor our families, teachers, mentors, peers; work to see and discern the sufferings and needs of the human family; work to redeem and transform the prejudice, intolerance and meanness of the human heart; work to honor the intellectual tradition designed to open up our minds, awaken us to a humble sense of how little we see, know and understand – work to save the earth; work to make meaning in our lives.

The work of rescue lives and flourishes every day and every hour throughout the United States and the world, but the daily acts of kindness, healing, dedication and concern may occur quietly, invisibly away from our own eyes or the eyes of the press or the public.

The only way to defeat the forces of cynicism, bitterness and selfishness is to give, to give generously and selflessly to people and causes greater than ourselves. It is the paradoxical truth that lies at the heart of St. Andrew's: we grow, develop, see, recognize, feel, change and apologize only when we give ourselves the opportunity to share in the life, worry, anxiety and concerns of other people. We create meaning and rescue by redefining the human passion for individualism, acclaim, power, authority and even salvation. The only way to rescue yourself is to rescue others.

If you feel love, generosity and appreciation as you prepare to graduate, you have lived here with kindness, empathy and gratefulness – not because you were perfect when you arrived or perfect as you matured or perfect now – but because you have grown, responded, improved your ability to embrace a greater good in your lives.

Life is messy. It is complicated, frustrating and complex – we do our best each day to meet our obligations, to grow in wisdom, dignity and understanding and prepare for challenges we can never imagine. I believe with all my heart that the way through anxiety, sadness, bitterness and despair is through individual acts of love, care, concern and mercy.

As a senior in love with the pursuit of learning, you have recognized that the more you know, the more you need to read, study, write, problem-solve and create. As a senior in love with humanity, you have learned that others' personal and psychological lives are just as complicated as yours. As a senior who has embraced growth, recognition and personal development, you have learned to put away childhood things and childish preoccupations, excuses and obsessions.

As a class, you have excelled in the art of education and rescue – you have lived graciously, generously and joyfully among us. You have welcomed us into this community, electrified our classrooms, arts and athletic programs – you have deepened the School's commitment to environmental stewardship, diversity and community service.

You have handled tragedy, sadness and despair with courage, vitality and resilience. We love you, honor you and have great expectations for you.

I will end this morning with this quotation from Václav Havel, reflecting on the work that lies ahead of all of us:

Man must rebel against his role as a helpless cog in the gigantic and enormous machinery hurtling God knows where. He must discover again, within himself, a deeper sense of responsibility for the world which means responsibility towards something higher than himself.