

Chapel Talk  
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As a young boy growing up, the stories about heroes and superheroes were always my favorite because they provided me with exemplars to look up to as I struggled to find my place in the world. As I grew older, I started to realize that the Hero's journey serves as a metaphor for the spiritual journey that each individual will take in their lives as they pass through the stages of birth, childhood, marriage, and eventually death. As Professor Eva Thury from Drexler University states:

*"We are all heroes struggling to accomplish our adventure; we engage in a series of struggles to develop as individuals and to find our place in society. Beyond that we long for wisdom. We want to understand the universe and the significance of our role in it."*

Although each path that an individual takes in their life is unique, the individual journey is always about self-discovery and growth. Those who do not undertake this journey are like the fictional character of Peter Pan—a boy who refuses to grow up and wants to remain in Neverland as leader of the Lost Boys. Yes, it might seem like it would be great to always be a kid. But how would society function?

Many of the myths and fables that children read are coming-of-age stories meant to help children transition from the early childhood stage and on to the next. These stories are able to grab and hold a child's attention with magical beasts, grotesque witches, and beautiful maidens. In Irish folklore there is the common character of the deceitful leprechaun who is constantly worried about someone stealing his pot of gold. Another popular archetype in Western mythology are dragons, who represent a human motivation; they are often seen residing in a cave guarding a large fortune. Ironically, no one questions the premise of what in the heck a dragon would need gold for? It is not like a dragon is going to use it to buy clothes or a car or a nice house. However, I think most people who read these stories subconsciously understand that in the end these deformed creatures and terrifying beasts are symbols that represent the ego, which is fixated on collecting as much wealth or possessions as possible. These are cautionary tales about the ugliness of allowing our impulses to go unchecked.

I would like to take a moment to share a quick story from my life which captures another important concept associated with the hero's journey. I relate this story because most of you in this room are probably in the first phase of the Hero's Journey known as "the call to adventure."

### **Call to Adventure**

In this stage, the hero usually starts off in the ordinary world and receives some message which compels him or her to leave the ordinary world behind. For example, in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, this occurs

when Harry receives the magical letter that invites him to Hogwarts. For me, my call to adventure occurred during my sophomore year in college. At the time, I was tentatively considering majoring in Business, seeing it as the best way to support myself upon graduation. However, deep down, I had this general dissatisfaction with the traditional way college life prepares one for the real world. It was uninspiring: you could wake up and go to classes, or skip classes, and either way it seemed that professors did not really care. The goal was to get your degree, then go out to the real world and make money in order to support your family.

In college, I felt the path I was heading down would not make me happy because there had to be more to life than just focusing on making money. It was at this time that I had my call to adventure, when I met a recruiter for the United States Marine Corps. There was something about this recruiter that was different than any other person on campus. He was tall and immaculately dressed in his service uniform, but more importantly he had this air about him—not cocky but confident. Dressed in his uniform, he seemed like a knight in shining armor.

Usually, when there are job recruiters on campus, the recruiters will give you a sales pitch telling you all the great things that this organization or job will do for you in the future. However, the Marine recruiter was different. In approaching him to ask him about the Marine Corps, he responded by stating, "Our motto is: we don't promise you a rose garden, but if you think you are tough enough, come out next week when we run a physical fitness test to see what you got." At the time I didn't realize it, but this was "the call." It was the challenge that I was looking for in order to prove to myself that I was something different, something special. Eventually, after

taking the physical fitness test and seeing the recruiter kick my butt, I knew that this is where I belonged. I knew that this was really the important test in life, not the one in the classroom.

### **Refusal of the Call**

When I told my parents that I was going to join the Marine Corps they were dead set against it, stating that "the military is no place for a black man—you will never get ahead." These were the voices trying to get me to refuse the call. Now, I don't blame my parents for trying to discourage me from my path because parents are there to protect you, and it is very hard for them to let you go. Although I love my parents and respect their advice, I was no longer a child and had to make my own decisions.

The third stage of the Hero's journey is about crossing the first threshold. In this stage the hero leaves the ordinary world and enters into a new world from which the adventure begins. For me this was the ten weeks of Basic Training in Officer Candidate School at Quantico Virginia. The purpose of Officer Candidate School is to screen and evaluate potential Marine Corps officers based on their physical and mental toughness. Thirty to fifty

percent of those who start OCS do not finish. One of the biggest barriers to graduation is the obstacle course which serves as threshold guardian blocking the path of those young men and women who desire to lead Marines. At the end of the obstacle course is the dreaded rope climb which is where many candidates fail as they are too exhausted to navigate their way up to the top. However, for me the physical aspect of Basic Training was easy and definitely was my strength, as I was quick and swift of foot and ended up finishing with the fastest time in the battalion. As a reward for crossing the first threshold and finishing O.C.S. I was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Marine Corps.

After receiving my commission, like all new lieutenants, I was assigned to the Basic School where I spent six months learning the basics of being an officer and how to lead. It was at this time that my ego started to grow based on my previous success. As a present for graduating college and being commissioned as an officer, I went out and bought myself a nice car. This was no average car, but rather a limited-edition Purple BMW M3 with a personalized license plate with the last name Mufuka on it.

At the Basic School I was pretty arrogant. Fortunately or unfortunately, forces in life would quickly teach me a valuable lesson. About two months into the Basic School on a typical cold winter night I was driving off base when I drove over an icy bridge. Since my car was a high-performance car not well suited for the winter, I lost traction and drove off the road, eventually flipping the car and landing in a ditch. I had a few cuts and scratches, but the only thing that was really damaged was my ego. The only reason I have photos of this incident is because my best friend, when he heard that I crashed the car, immediately came out to the scene. After he realized that I was okay, with a big smile on his face, he started taking photos, which eventually made it into our unit yearbook. Here is a photo of me be checked out by the nurse after the accident.

I think anytime you have a near-death event, there is some type of reflection. For me, I thought that a higher power was trying to remind me of my mortality and teach me a valuable lesson about humility.

As some of you know, I rarely give a speech without making a reference to Star Wars. So as not to disappoint you, there is a great line in *Empire Strikes Back*, when Yoda asks Luke, "Why are you here? Why do you want to be a Jedi?" For me, I lost sight of why I was here. I joined the Marine Corps because I received the call to serve—not to serve my own personal vanity, but to serve others. I had lost sight of that purpose and had to be reminded by a little divine intervention.

Now I will stop here with my own individual journey rather than continue and tell you about the mentors and allies that I met, the different trials and tests, the supreme ordeal or magical flights that occurred during the later stages of my journey. I stop here because this is the point where most of you are in regards to your life.

Since St. Andrew's is a boarding school, you have already begun to start your own individual journey—or as Joseph Campbell would call it, "the hero's journey," just by making the decision to leave your families, friends, and home to come to the middle of Delaware in the pursuit of knowledge. You have all started your own individual journey whether you know it or not. You have all answered the call and decided to cross the first threshold. At the border between the ordinary and magical world, you might have encountered a threshold guardian such as a parent who in their need to protect you tried to convince you not to come here. Or maybe you had no choice and you were told you are coming here because your parents came here and knew the value of this School. Some of you have come great distances looking for the opportunity to learn at a magical place. While there are other inspiring schools out there, we know this one is special. Just like Hogwarts in *Harry Potter*, we have our own Albus Dumbledore in Mr. Roach, the wise and compassionate leader whose sole focus is the protection of the student body, in Mr. Speers, we have Professor Snape who is completely trusted by the Headmaster but is unforgiving in his grading. We also have the more obscure character of Gilderoy Lockhart, who although he doesn't share the personality characteristics, you have to admit bears an uncanny resemblance to Mr. Robinson. Instead of the Weasley twins, we have the Wood boys and then finally, we have you. **Who** will you be? Will **you** be the hero?

As I end my talk, I want to close with a little anecdote. This is my first year as an advisor to students. I have seven wonderful advisees and I remember reviewing their applications to St. Andrew's over the summer and being struck by the maturity of these new students. One of my advisees wrote on his application: My lifelong goal is to be the "kindest and most thoughtful person I can be." Think about it. What a wonderful goal—it expresses really what the hero is all about. In the end, the hero is one who comes to the realization that it is not about him or her. The hero is the one who has answers, the call to serve others. I truly believe that in each one of you there is the potential to be a hero. For some of you, like my advisees, my only advice is to remember who you are. For those who still are stuck in Neverland. I just ask you to take what you learn here at St. Andrew's. Take to heart the examples set by the teachers, who 24 hours of the day are there for you in order to keep you safe. If you do this, I can promise you that you will have a wonderful adventure of your own.

Godspeed.