



High School Graduation

June 7, 2018

Speech by Marcus Lustig, Class of 2015

Having heard of GDS, a school where students experience exceptional growth, two parents decide to visit on a tour. They walk into the forum and immediately find two teachers quarreling over how it is their students grow. One teacher is a small, bald man of biology named Bill. The other teacher is called Topher, and he wears a hat.

“Topher,” Bill exclaims, “Excuse me, but I am a man of science so I know the way that all biotic life grows. Look at the senior Evan Palmer,” he says as he points. “Look how high up into the air Evan’s head is, aloft and above all the rest. Obviously, our students grow from the bottom up.”

Topher shakes his head. “I’m sorry, Bill,” he says. “But I am a man of fashion. Notice how all the students’ pants hit their ankles at different positions. Obviously, our students grow from the top down. And,” Topher continues, “If the pants aren’t reason enough look at Marcus Lustig for God’s sake,” he says as he points. “Look how close to the ground that kid is.”

What escaped those two arguing teachers, besides maybe some careful sensitivity and the visitors on-looking, is the modest truth which all here today have learned the past four years: that really at GDS students don’t grow top down or bottom up, but from the inside out.

And what does that mean exactly? It means our teachers taught us to stretch and reach, not only up to grasp for the stars, but for the hands of another; it means we learned that our intelligence is worthless without integrity, that happiness begins with humility, and that rather than solemnity, empathy is the hard evidence of maturity. We know now that achievement does not bring success, character does. And we know our own success will not be won; it will be woven, as we tether and tie together our own life-stories.

Some of those lessons, however, we did learn from our parents. And briefly, parents, thank you. Thank you for doing what is right, but not always easy. Thank you for your support and your sacrifice. And to my own mother, thank you for packing four more years worth of lunches than

any reasonable parent should be expected to.

Softly, quietly, our world's great old storyline has been played out again: others have sacrificed so that we, the young, could grow. And now the world asks us, "Where are you going?" For about a year and a half we have sought out a destination in answer: this program, this college, this university. Seduced by expectations, we have carefully and graciously chosen visions for our futures. A theologian and university president, often a seller of such expectations, once shocked his audience with this pertinent rule about college. His rule was a double-one: "If you find what you expected," he said, "Transfer at the end of the first year; if you find what your father expected, transfer immediately." The events of tomorrow will not and, as this university president suggested, should not follow our designs. Our plans will be undermined, our preparations rendered insufficient; that is when we will grow. But how can we ensure that ultimately, whether way out in California or way down in Texas, we are going towards a life of value?

Two brothers are traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus. The younger brother leaves first to secure for them a room in which to stay. The older brother leaves later but not long into his journey finds his younger brother sitting off to the side at a five-way fork in the road. The younger brother explains despairingly that the signpost with arrows pointing to the five different cities has fallen down and so he doesn't know which road to take towards Damascus. The older brother calmly lifts the fallen signpost and points the arrow marked 'Jerusalem' back toward the road from which he had just come. The older brother explains, "If you know where you've come from, you'll always know where to go."

And so it is with us: if we remember where we've come from, remember practice in the gym running late or striking the set in the theater until early morning, remember Friday long lunches and Wednesday long mini breaks, remember grade-wide field trips, Safeway chicken-noodle, and the winter dance we had in the parking garage, remember that, when you got your paper back, the grade didn't matter because the two pages of comments made it clear that you mattered, remember when he skipped class with you because you asked, remember when she came to the show although you hadn't asked, remember the warmth of entering the forum to familiar faces and the hum of morning conversation just before the eight fifteen bell, if we remember where and from whom we have come, then we will never falter.

No single day, no single moment was wasted, because all were spent crafting the young people we are and molding the dreams of the better people we will become. And so, as we begin to shape our own legacy, I'll share with my class the advice of the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson: "It is an illusion that the present hour is not the critical, decisive hour. Write it on your heart that every day is the best day of the year. No man has learned anything rightly, until he knows that today is a king in disguise. Let us unmask the king as he passes."