



Dear Saint Mary's Hall,

This week my chapel message is a written one, instead of a video, because I was tied up this past week filming the Baccalaureate service for the Class of 2020 since it will be virtual this year regrettably. I also was involved with the filming of other upcoming virtual ceremonies, such as Commencement and Form 5 and Form 8 Promotions. I am healthy and doing well and simply needed to write this week's message due to my other work responsibilities last week.

My message this week is one that I hold closely to personally, and it also forms the basis for what I do as a chaplain, pastor, and human. My message is one of hope. It's about both receiving and giving hope. This message of hope is that God, who is unimaginably so very good and gracious, is always at work bringing much good to each of our lives and situations, especially those immensely overwhelming or demanding times.

This message grows out of scriptures such as Romans 8:28 in the Christian New Testament, which says "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Another scripture that affirms is Jeremiah 29:11, which says, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you ...and to give you *hope* and a future."

As we remain sheltered-in-place in our homes and are now unable to return to school for the rest of the year, I take great hope and strength in these scriptures which emphasize that God is very much at work, bringing many blessings and much good to each of our lives and situations.

When I deployed to Kuwait in the Middle East last July through this January, I knew my mission was to lead a team of Air Force Chaplain Corps members and to ensure that we brought much spiritual strength and great support to all our troops in Kuwait.

One evening my commander called me to his office. Never one to exaggerate or overstate situations, he had my complete attention when said, "Chaplain, it looks like you're going to have the longest and most demanding days of your entire deployment beginning tonight."

Starting that night, my team and I worked around the clock to meet our commander's and his boss' intent that every troop withdrawing to our base from Iraq and Syria was greeted by a Chaplain Corps member and provided the support they needed as soon as they stepped off the plane at my base.

These troops had to be rapidly evacuated out of their AOR (Area of Responsibility), and their leadership knew that when they arrived in Kuwait that they would be exhausted physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I can tell you they were spent when they arrived, given all that they had been through.

My Chaplain Corps team and I greeted every single plane filled with soldiers and Airmen as they arrived over the course of a week, whether they landed at "zero-dark-thirty" or in the middle of the day. As my team developed our plan for effectively caring for these troops, we decided we would always arrive at the air terminal on base and greet our troops with care packages in hand. Many of those care packages were sent from the amazing students and families of Saint Mary's Hall! So thanks to all of you who worked with Chap Su to send these to us in Kuwait!

As my team and I shared the care packages and spent time with these troops, their expressions and spirits took a 180 degree turn for the better. I have the photos to show it. Their faces transformed from dejected, weary, and downcast expressions to the most lively, joyful, and upbeat of ones. It was truly remarkable to see, and I'll never forget it. It all happened as my team and I talked, prayed, and shared care packages with these brave but drained troops. It was a rather unremarkable thing we did in all honesty, but it made a remarkable difference just as our leadership expected that it would.

My team's and my hope during those long days and nights was that the troops arriving from other AORs would have a strong sense in the midst of their crisis and time of trial that God was there, bringing them the care and support that they needed at that moment.

With the remainder of our school year at Saint Mary's Hall now being online and very important ceremonies being virtual this year, like Commencement and the Promotions for Form 5 and Form 8, this is a difficult time for us as a Saint Mary's Hall family. Due to this, my message today is two-fold.

First, be on the lookout for how God is bringing much good into this situation that includes lots of disappointment, sadness and pain, and many challenges. Second, be on the lookout for ways you can be the one through whom much good and God's very love comes to others.

Fred Rogers once advised that during a crisis to “look for the helpers.” While wise and good, also seek to be one of those helpers. Similarly, look for God and his goodness and seek to be a person through whom God’s love comes.

That’s what I had the privilege to experience when deployed – to see God’s goodness in so many ways and to be part of a team that brought much good to our troops, which I take great pride in.

Now we all have that same opportunity to look for God’s goodness and to be a way in which it comes to others.

I want to close by wishing a “Ramadan Mubarak” or a Blessed Ramadan to our students and families who have begun observing the holy month of Ramadan. Ramadan, as many may know, is a sacred time in the Muslim tradition to focus on faith, prayer, fasting, and compassion. May this time be one in which hope is received and given.

God bless,

Rev. Cameron Gunnin