

HEAD LINES

A Monthly Message from Chip Denton, Head of School



August 31, 2018

Dear Trinity Community,

Welcome to Trinity School's 24th year! Amidst the excitement of the beginning of school, with new classes, new teachers, and new and renewed friendships, I wanted to share with you the first of a new series of monthly messages on Trinity's mission and vision. As we look toward the future, it's important also to know where we've come from.

I am often asked, "Why did the founders start Trinity School?" Here's an elevator answer: We wanted an independent (not church-run), K-12 school that joined serious learning with robust Christian faith. Some of the particulars of Trinity's mission, back in 1995, were still being formed (unhurriedness, the influence of Charlotte Mason, and the particular way we would go about being classical), but from the beginning the goal was a school that took both learning and Christian faith seriously. And as if this were not an unusual enough compound, we also wanted a Christian school that is both ecumenical (encouraging different Christian traditions) and open to the community (regardless of religious perspective).

One of the reasons that we talk so much about the mission of Trinity is that such a school does not just happen. Our mission needs care and feeding. It needs to be understood and embraced by every new generation of parents. That would include the 45 new families we have this year (welcome!), of course, but in fact it includes us all, for unless Trinity's mission lives in the hearts and minds of all of our parents and faculty, we could easily devolve into a successful independent school that has lost its saltiness ("Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?" Mark 9:50)

So let's season this 24th year once again with a dash of mission. We are aiming for a school that pursues both belief and understanding. This is not, in our culture, a given. If we were to throw a rock into a crowd of people in downtown Durham (I don't recommend this), we'd almost certainly hit someone who thinks that belief or faith is irrelevant to the intellectual life, and there's a pretty good chance it would land on one who thinks that belief actually corrupts the pursuit of truth. (When I was studying at a certain university nearby, it was an axiom of some in my department that a faith commitment compromises one's ability to do good scholarly work.) So the very idea of wanting to include both learning and faith is somewhat "salty." I assume that most of us at Trinity think that both of these are important. At Trinity, we have never been interested in merely allowing or tolerating faith in our learning community. ("The religion at Trinity isn't important to me, but it doesn't do any harm.") Nor have we wanted to add our Christian faith to an education that is integral without it—like some religious icing or even sprinkles on the cake of learning. Rather, we believe that the best education we can offer is Christian, and we believe that the best way of following Christ will lead us to educate well. The two are integrated. They belong together.

We talk about that integration in two complementary ways. Our first motto, "Understand so that you will believe," is founded on the legitimate idea that our minds matter, that God appeals to us through our reason and experience, that the Christian has evidence for believing in things unseen. We think of Peter's command that we Christians be prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have in Christ (1 Peter 3:15). At Trinity we are deeply committed to helping our students see the reasonableness of our faith and to giving answers to those who challenge that. But that is not enough.

We have a second motto: "Believe so that you will understand." We all (materialists no less than supernaturalists) have beliefs that generate understanding. The question is, which beliefs-leading-to-understanding are true? And while we believe that reason can point the way for our students, we also recognize that each one of us has but one life to live, and that this life will be founded on some particular beliefs. As Trinity alumni parent and Duke New Testament professor Kavin Rowe says about early Christianity and Roman Stoicism, "Both...claimed that their pattern of life was the truth of all things but also that such truth could be known only through the time it took to live the tradition that was the truth" (*One True Life*, 6). We who have read the Gospel of Mark this summer can add our own assent to this idea that we have to believe and live something to get it. In Mark, true understanding of Jesus and his kingdom does not come easily (think how dense the disciples were); only the repeated hearing of God's Word and participation in the mission of Jesus (which means following the suffering Son of God) allow us to "see" like the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:14-26).

What does this look like in the lives of Trinity students? It looks like an amazing team of teachers, all committed to the Jesus Way, modeling for students how Christian faith leads to a deeper and wiser understanding of themselves, of their friendships, of the natural world and the subjects that they tackle. It looks like teachers helping young students live into the Christian Way before they are really capable of understanding many of the deep things that ground that Way. It looks like giving older students the space to question that Way, knowing that only a willing submission to this Way can yield the fruit of understanding. And it looks like teachers helping students who are ready to follow Jesus' Way to go deep and to discover what Jesus meant when he said that "to whoever has, more will be given" (Mark 4:25).

Here's to a year when we all discover the truth, goodness, and beauty of understanding through faith in Jesus.

Non nobis,



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