

McCALLIE

— HONOR TRUTH DUTY —



“Mothers, Men, and the Crowns We Choose”

Commencement Remarks

by Head of School Lee Burns '87

Sunday, May 14, 2023

And now, as we approach the conclusion of a school year for the 118th time in our history, we present diplomas to McCallie seniors, signifying that you 185 men succeeded in meeting our high standards. On behalf of the faculty and staff, I express to you our admiration and affection for your service and leadership, for your hard work and humor, for your accomplishments and achievements, for your character and camaraderie, and for your passion for one another and our school.

I hope you leave here with the sense of having been challenged, supported, nurtured and loved, and that you belong. I hope you leave here with a greater and growing sense of who you are, who you can become, and the positive difference you can make in the world. I am confident that each of you will, in your own ways, lead and leave your mark on our world.

As you sit here at this momentous and memorable moment of your McCallie commencement, I encourage you to pause to reflect upon those people who have brought you to this morning with their love, encouragement, resources and sacrifices, starting with your mothers who brought you into this world around 2004. Today is Mother's Day, so it is especially important that we acknowledge and celebrate our mothers. Thank you, McCallie Moms.

I had the great fortune to spend last weekend with my own mother in London, herself a McCallie grandmother, as my brother Jim and I took her to the coronation of King Charles III, 70 years after his mother Queen Elizabeth's coronation which my mother had also attended as a young girl. It was a powerful experience for the three of us, but especially for her as she traced her former steps and connected place, passion, and event from an early to a late season in her life. And it was powerful for my brother and me to provide her with a joyful bucket list experience, a small way to thank her for the multitude of blessings and gifts she'd given us, including a McCallie education.

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We left my brother's London townhouse at 3:30 a.m. on Saturday in hopes of arriving early enough to secure a spot along the Mall to view King Charles, Queen Camila, and the royal family as they and the procession journeyed from Buckingham Palace to and from Westminster Abbey, where Charles was officially anointed as king in a ceremony dating back 1,000 years. We stood shoulder to shoulder with strangers for about 10 hours, much of it in a cold rain, with aching backs and pressured bladders, for the sight of this regal ritual replete with resplendent soldiers and horses, bands, and carriages parading down the tree-lined, flag-filled boulevard. We eventually saw the king and queen ride by us in an ornate golden carriage dating back centuries.



I went not really to honor King Charles, the royal family, the royal tradition, or the pomp and circumstance, but to honor my mother. Standing by her, I saw in her not 83 years of old age, but a vitality of energy fueled by a spirit of adventure. I saw a determination to pursue passions and principles, to persist and persevere, to pray and to play. I saw a pillar of strength who bequeathed to and blessed me with the best of her. I am grateful and forever blessed by how she's loved, shaped, and fortified me.

What's your story of your mom or other Wonder Woman in your life?

As a boys' school of almost 1,000 boys, we can sometimes overlook or underplay the impact of the girls and women in our lives. I encourage you today to thank your mothers and step-mothers, your grandmothers and aunts, your sisters, GPS girls, and female friends, the women who teach and advise and coach you—all these girls and women for the impact they have on you, for the love and leadership and laughter they share and show, for the ways they inspire you. And as you prepare for college and life beyond, I advise you to be attuned to the strength, intellect, talents, wisdom, and standards that



your future female college classmates, colleagues, supervisors, life partners, and friends will bring to you in ways that will enrich your lives and your journey in the upcoming years. To all of the girls and women here and to those of you joining us online, McCallie salutes you.

But principally we gather this morning to salute you seniors, with these diplomas metaphorically as your crowning McCallie achievements. You've waited many years, struggled and sweated and stretched for them, and here they are.



While your wait was just a few years, Prince Charles waited for his crown for many decades until his mid-seventies. I hope, though, that your diploma is not your ultimate McCallie crown.

As you turn the page and enter into a new season of your lives, I hope you will ponder what type of crown you aspire to wear...and that you will wear a crown worthy of the ideals McCallie sought to foster in your hearts, minds, and souls.

It's common to wear crowns for accomplishments, for victories, to signify reaching the highest levels professionally. Crowns project power and influence. Status. Their gold, their jewels, symbolize money, and the glitz and sparkle attract attention and convey celebrity. They, and what they represent, are alluring.

As McCallie graduates, you are equipped and prepared to achieve and lead at the highest levels, to garner influence and gather resources, and I'll happily and proudly give you a hat tip when you do so.

But I hope your crowns will be different from the worldly ones most people want to wear.

Paul puts it this way in 1 Corinthians 9:25, "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever."

What crowns last? They are the ones built on something stronger and more enduring than gold...on glorifying and enjoying God, on loving and serving Him and others, on loving your neighbor as yourself, on a purpose-filled life that makes a positive difference in the world, on a wise life of Truth, on a life infused with grace and forgiveness.

That's a very different crown than the one King Charles wore last Saturday, different than the weighty worldly ones built on performance and production, promotions and profits, the perfect and the pretty—the ones which lead eventually to exhaustion and emptiness, anxiety and addiction—the ones that, ultimately, are more than we can bear to wear.

Shakespeare famously said, "Heavy is the head that wears the crown."

Jesus, though, laid aside his heavenly, regal crown and instead wore a very different crown: one of gruesome thorns, one of infinite weight, so that we might wear one of grace-given triumph. He freed us to wear the light crown, the joyful and peaceful crown, His heavenly crown, the one that endures. He showed us, called us, and freed us to lead a life of trust and truth, service and sacrifice, gratitude and grace, unconditional love and unending peace.



What crown will you choose to wear? Who, or what, will be the King of your life, or will you be King?

I hope, in 70 years from now, all of you will choose to return here to the Ridge to connect the early chapters in your lives with the closing ones. I hope, as you retrace steps and recall transformative teachers and coaches, funny memories and defining moments, you see lifelong throughlines and themes that began here, that shaped your faith and character, the men you became, the choices you made, the crowns you chose to wear. I also hope, during those intervening 70 years, McCallie remained a trusted guide, companion, and resource to you, and that your classmates, your brothers, and your teachers were a sustaining source of strength, love, and encouragement on your journey through life.

Perhaps that day you'll stand on this very spot, and as your eyes sweep across the campus, even in its unimagined newness on the eve of the 22nd century, it will still be McCallie to you. Your home. Your family. Forever McCallie.

The diplomas we now give you are not simply to signify what you completed in the recent years leading up to 2023, but they are hopes and prayers for your future—for the men you become, for the lives you will lead. And they are invitations to return home for the next 70 years, to be loved and fortified, and to stand shoulder to shoulder with the next generations of boys—including your sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons—as they process into the long blue line that stretches on and on and on. On McCallie, and onward McCallie.

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