

Valedictory Address | Class of 2006

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What has happened in our minds and in our hearts this year is not easy to put into words. There are many questions and ideas wrestling in my mind right now that have not yet been sorted out, and so there is much synthesis and thinking yet to be done. Some of the issues that have been presented to us and discussed this year will be with us for the rest of our lives, to be thought through, grappled with, and discussed over and over again. Questions surrounding truth, beauty, goodness, justice, love, duty, the role of the church and the role of tradition – or perhaps more importantly our understanding of these things – will never leave us or be completely humanly resolved.

Needless to say, this year was by no means one of easy answers. Rather, we were confronted by the big questions – those that have no simple reply. This did not always feel satisfying; I think we often felt further from some type of solution than ever after being presented with more angles than we thought could have existed. But it was meaningful. And while answers were not always to be had there is no doubt that light was shed.

I commend our professors for steering our conversations into these at times unsettling areas. While simpler things could have been focused on and these issues avoided, they would not allow us to be sheltered in this way. These kinds of questions are simply unavoidable because they are fundamental to human nature. I can imagine that it would have been far easier both for the students and the professors to work with lists of memorizable facts. This easy alternative has become so attractive, in fact, that it has largely taken over where real teaching and learning once took place – in the university. But Augustine College did not present us with the easy way out.

Our minds were not treated like machines, to work like computers memorizing as much raw data as they could take in but instead were afforded the dignity they demand when regarded as an integral part of humans, designed specifically in the image of God, to function in relationship with others as a part of an interacting community.

This is not to say that no answers to any questions have been found this year. We learned that the whole is more than the sum of its parts – reductionism fails to tell the complete story. We learned that the Dark Ages weren't so dark after all. Specifically, Trevor Tucker taught us how to most efficiently eradicate the squirrel population; Wesley Warren informed us that most of the history of Western music consists of transcendental, otherworldly sorts of music composed by very hedonistic men; Professor Bloedow told us of all the wretches in ancient Rome; and Dr. Patrick enlightened us of the many problems with our generation and more importantly how to fix them (namely through a process of out-breeding the pagans).

Knowledge has been gained but more importantly the ways in which we approach and acquire knowledge have been affected. We have learned to read thoughtfully and critically; to listen patiently and ardently; and to discuss openly and purposefully by carefully choosing our words and thinking before we speak. Most of all, an attitude of humility, so gracefully exemplified by our professors, was proven to be the only attitude of real learning. This willingness of the professors to let the conversation drift into areas perhaps outside their realm of expertise, to raise questions to which they did not necessarily have the answers, and to listen so unwearyingly to our

amateur opinions and comments displayed this attitude to us very clearly.

Completing a program like Augustine College could lead one to the temptation of feeling fairly smart. I by no means want to take away from the work and learning we have accomplished this year, but I think the rest of my class would agree with me that as much as we have learned this year, I think we have become even more aware of how much we do not know and how much there is yet to learn and to read.

Our reading lists grew exponentially throughout the year, as each day every professor would mention yet another book that we simply must read. I could read for years just from the list made these past eight months. With every new topic or historical period introduced we realized that there was a whole other sphere of learning to be explored and read about that we were ignorant of. Having this feeling sustained over the course of an academic year can be overwhelming, but rather than feel discouraged or conquered by our illiteracy we were inspired to remedy that state.

Obviously in a year like this, there are so many new ideas being thrown at us that we could never investigate fully all the areas that spurred our interest. But seeds have been planted that crave nourishment and I think for many of us, to a large extent, the future of our education and academic careers will be steered by the seeking of that nourishment.

We were all placed in a rather unique situation this year that lent itself to the building of community and the development of our understanding of community. The picture we get in Acts, chapter 2, of the community of believers being all together and having everything in common is more appreciable after spending this time in such close quarters with so few people. Our schedules, both academic and otherwise, were almost entirely common to the group.

Simple things that accompany everyday life became also increasingly shared as the year went on. This is not always an easy situation to find oneself in, but the benefits of participating in such a community are abundant, and the burdens seem negligible. One of the philosophers who has influenced me the most this year, Martin Buber, gives the following description of community in his book *I and Thou*:

True community does not come into being because people have feelings for each other (though that is required, too), but rather on two accounts: all of them have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to a single living centre, and they have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to one another. The second event has its source in the first but is not immediately given with it. A living reciprocal relationship includes feelings but is not derived from them. A community is built upon a living, reciprocal relationship, but the builder is the living, active centre (p. 94).

I am not sure if this ideal of “true community” is really sustainable by fallen human beings. We are all broken and seem incapable of maintaining these living reciprocal relationships for long. But still, true community was had here at Augustine and though the community itself cannot be carried away with us the insights we gained into what it really means to live in community are things that will stay with us and that we can bring to each successive community we find ourselves placed in. In John 17 we read that Jesus prayed to the Father that the disciples might be one and brought to complete unity, just as the Son and Father are one. Our understanding of what Jesus meant here is certainly not complete, but this year has added depth to it.

The fact that we are now going to different schools and jobs does not diminish the value of the time we spent in communion here. I firmly

believe that each of us, every student, professor and everyone else who was a part of the college this year, was sent here, for this specific time and place, with a purpose. I think we all would say that the things we experienced and learned here were an ongoing confirmation that this was where we were meant to be this year. I believe that the scattering is just as purposeful as our time here was.

We read of the church being scattered in Acts, chapter 8, and to them it may very well have felt like a meaningless dispersal, but in reality this was the beginning of the fulfillment of what Jesus said in Acts, chapter 1: that they would be His “witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” But this scattering could take place only after the time they had spent together in community, sharing all they had and being of one heart and mind (Acts 4:32).

And so I know that this year spent together in Christian community dedicated to the pursuit of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful was fundamental to our being sent off to fulfil the purpose God has for each of our futures.

I would now ask that you join me in prayer as I pray words based on those that Jesus prayed over his disciples, as recorded in John 17.

Our Father, we thank you for what you have revealed to us this year. We pray that at this time, the end of our year at Augustine College, you would grant us a full measure of your joy. As we leave this place, we ask not that you would take us out of this world but that you would protect us from the evil one, for we are not of this world, but have been sent to this world. Continue to sanctify us by your word, which is the truth. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray.

Amen.