

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE



Commencement Address

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I'm somewhat at a disadvantage in speaking to you today because I didn't attend my college graduation. In fact; I never even submitted a picture or bio to the yearbook. At that time, to me school was just a process that you had to go through. But things were different when I discovered surgery! I really enjoyed it so I participated at every opportunity. There is a real joy in having passion about your vocation.

But enough about me, Class of 2010. Let's talk about you.

Congratulations – your life has just changed! Yes, changed! You may not think it or feel it – but it has. One door has closed, others are opening. This is the commencement ceremony – the beginning. You may go on to the workplace, graduate school, marriage or even a short respite – but it will not be the same. And nobody likes change. Mark Twain said, “the only person who likes change is a wet baby.”

Through the ages, great philosophers including Aristotle, Swedenborg, Hegel and Kierkegaard have posited that the universe is constantly “becoming” and humans are not “beings” but “becomings.” We, in our religion, believe that this “human becoming” occurs to eternity.

But Becoming is change. Growth – physical, mental or spiritual – is change, so why are we so uneasy about it and why is it so unsettling? In *The Difference Maker*, John Maxwell states there are many reasons: fear of the unknown, personal loss, entrenched traditions, or the timing or awkwardness of the change.

Remember, change will happen whether you like it or not. And without change there can be no improvement. However, you must decide what you are not willing to change – and that is where values come in. Essential values are the rudders that guide us through the rough waters of change.

All colleges offer their students education, community and a calling card. Religion-based colleges, like Bryn Athyn, offer something more – values – moral and spiritual, the lighthouse which guides you to safe harbor. These are the principles giving purpose, meaning and significance to your life. In my opinion, values are more important than education, connection or a calling card. In graduating from Bryn Athyn College of the New Church, you not only have received a fine education, not only made life-long friends and companions; not only earned a calling card from a remarkable institution, but have been given and seen, from example, a life of choices, motivated by spiritual and moral values.

We are living in an uncertain age – uncertain economically, physically, morally and spiritually. An age in crisis. It is said that the Chinese character for crisis is made from two other characters meaning danger – and opportunity. So in spite of the uncertainty, there is opportunity. I've recently read that the Top Ten in-demand jobs of 2010 didn't exist in 2004, and half of the positions to be filled 10 years from

now have not yet been created.

Take, for example, the field of medicine. There will be a new direction, creating new jobs not only for doctors and nurses, but technicians, assistants, educators and navigators. New technologies and innovations will create new fields of endeavor. There will be more emphasis on healthcare rather than disease management. We will be educating and motivating the public on prevention, wellness and lifestyle changes rather than treating numbers and symptoms.

I foresee a whole new field of practitioners – health coaches, if you will – who will motivate and educate people in diet, exercise and stress management. Interactive Internet and telephonic monitoring will decrease hospital readmissions, complications from illness and medication side effects.

There will be other opportunities – not only in the life sciences, but in technology, finance, communication, government, legislature and so many other fields. The important thing is to choose your passion and follow it without changing your values.

Passion is important in your life choices. The more you like your job, the more avidly you will work, the harder your work, the better will be the outcomes, the better the outcomes, the more you will enjoy your job. And so it goes.

Satisfaction, in both career and life, is powerfully influenced by attitude. Attitude is the difference maker. However, you can't substitute confidence for competence, or expectation for experience, but given the same talents, attitude will be a game changer.

The recipe for a full life is gratitude, connections and usefulness. Human beings are hard wired to need these ingredients to find happiness. Connections – to spouse, family, loved ones, community and country – are necessary because we are gregarious by nature. This truth has been echoed through the ages from John Dunne stating “no man is an island” to Barbara Streisand whining about “the luckiest people in the world.”

Usefulness – the idea of performing a task that only you can do, that benefits your loved ones, neighbor or community – is also part of our makeup.

And as for gratitude – gratitude is the attitude. It allows us to recognize our uniqueness and the blessings that God has bestowed on us, no matter how difficult the road appears.

You have been given these spiritual and moral values at Bryn Athyn College of the New Church through the Sacred Scriptures and the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and you have been touched by the example of those who have lived by them through the years.

Make no mistake – there will still be difficulties, obstacles and adversity in your life, but by maintaining your values and attitudes, applying your education, strengthening friendships and following your passion, they can be overcome.

In conclusion, I leave you with an old Irish Blessing:

*“May those who love you, love you.
And may God turn the hearts of those who don't love you,
And if he can't turn their hearts, may he turn their ankles
So you will know them by their limping.”*

Let me once again congratulate you, the Class of 2010, on your accomplishment. Best wishes, and God bless you!