

President's Charge to the Graduates
Commencement
May 28, 2017

Science tells us that there is a universe beyond what our senses experience; that cats and cattle and so many others with whom we share the planet can see and hear and feel things that we never know are even there. The arts, humanities, and human sciences remind us that what is true of science is true also of our relations with each other. Against all the obvious facts, we know that there is more to us—call it self, or soul, or heart, or wish—than the lives we lead or the ways we act awake and asleep. And yet most of the time, most of us live as if our limits are the true limits of the world and not the accidents of our fragile bodies.

The literary critic Hugh Kenner said it this way: “What you are taking for granted is always more important than whatever you have your mind fixed on.” So at this moment, when you leave and we reluctantly let go, my charge is this: pay attention to what you can see with all the skill you have learned. Concentrate on what needs to be done and do it with the furious intellect and singular intensity you have displayed in your time here at Transylvania. But take the time to pay attention to all the things you cannot see. More than occasionally put down your cell phones and look up in awe at the vast, wondrously strange universe you occupy.

And when you do look up, and see all the pain and pathos that is, choose to be gracious to one another, to be compassionate, to be generous when grace and compassion and generosity are the last things on your minds. Remember the Psalmist who cried out: “How many are your works of creation, O Lord? / You have made them all with wisdom.”

We have sought to teach you to be creatures of intellect and discernment. We have told you that you may not wander in ignorance and small-mindedness. Find the wisdom in others even when they do not know or care that it is there. Use that

wisdom however you can for the benefit of others, even when they do not know they need or want help.

Finally, seek justice always and everywhere; but, please, temper its righteousness with kindness. We are creatures who work and eat and labor and die. It is easy to get caught up in what is and forget that there are infrareds we can never see, neurons firing that we can never feel, experiences that cannot be captured in words or held in memory. What we need most is unrequited care, works that do not need to be repaid, and forgiveness that exacts no price. Go then. The future awaits. Take with you the best you have gained from Transylvania. Give to the world what you have earned and more. Bear witness to the light you carry.