

"I am the vine: ye are the branches"

King's-Edgehill Collegiate School has been the place of your abiding whether for a year or for many years. Today at your graduation you are the pride of the school and the pride of your parents, grandparents, family and friends. Today you go forth from this place. It is the day, really, of your leaving. What kind of connection to this place of abiding will remain?

There is a parallel between the school and the land in which it is situated. Both are places of cultivation: the cultivation of the land, on the one hand, and the cultivation of heart and mind, body and soul, on the other hand. The intellectual, spiritual, moral, social and physical virtues which, we hope, have been cultivated in you have achieved a kind of maturity. Something of who you are is bound up in the programme of cultivation in this place. A good part of who you are has been shaped by this place of abiding. But only to the extent that you have entered into the purpose of this place and made these things your own.

There is always the question about what kind of garden we are going to be, as it were. Isaiah puts it this way:

*Let me sing for my beloved
a love song concerning his
vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard...*

*He looked for it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.*

The prophet is the poet who sings of God and his desire for his people - for Israel - but by extension he signals something of God's desire for the world and for all of us. What kind of world will we make? What kind of people will we be? Will we make the world a desolating wilderness and ourselves a barren wilderness of despair? To do so is contrary to what is wanted and to what has been attempted to be cultivated in you. "*He looked for it to yield grapes*" - what is wanted is a garden, a vineyard of virtue - "*but it yielded wild grapes.*"

John takes up this image of God's love for his people into the transcendent mystery of the love of God himself. We have our abiding in the love of God which has been opened to view.

It is an abiding love, moreover, which is made known and accomplished precisely in and through the desolating wilderness of human sin. Such is the meaning of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the shape, too, of this very building. We are recalled to ideas and principles which are greater than

ourselves and which are always there for us to enter into. *"Abide in me and I in you."*

We have our abiding in the understanding of these images. At least they are there for us to understand and to wrestle with their meaning for each of us in our lives. They provide a way of understanding - a way of connecting together - the varied enterprises of your time here in this place of abiding. The understanding is a kind of abiding which you can take with you and into which you can continue to grow. Graduation, after all, is but another step up into a higher level of understanding, maturity and responsibility.

We begin each day at King's-Edgehill here in the Chapel with a kind of dance of the understanding - a theological dance, if you will - which at once grounds us and exalts us. At least, that is my hope and prayer. We have attempted to enter into the understanding of the great images of the world's story - the world's story at once forgotten and yet there to be remembered - which is really the story of God written out for us to read in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Through that story, we have struggled, like Homer, to name the moral and intellectual principles at work in the spiritual landscape of our world and day; even more, like Israel, we have learned to name them to God in God's own naming of himself.

Through the integrity of the religious tradition and character of this school - whether we personally identify with it or not - we have wrestled with the difficult and yet, serious and important question of the place of religion in our institutions and culture. We have done so through the integrity of the religion which belongs objectively to this school in its foundation, its history and its character. Only so can we honour and respect the vast variety of religions and non-religions belonging to the complexity of contemporary society and to individual lives. After all, no-name religion is really no religion.

Through the scriptural images of the understanding we have wrestled with the great question, which bears down upon our age, about *'what is it good to be?'* without which we cannot consider *'what is it that is right to do?'* It is to be sure a philosophical and indeed, a theological question. It belongs to our freedom and our dignity to allow the weight of such questions to be felt in our souls. Without it, we leave ourselves open to emptiness, vanity and despair. We become a barren wilderness within.

You see, the dance goes on as it always must. *"I am the Lord of the Dance, said he"*, as the hymn puts it. I can only hope and pray that you will let it go on in you. May you find your place of abiding in the dance of the understanding. May what has been cultivated in you here continue to grow in you to the glory of God, the honour of this school and the good of the people and world wherever you are.

The dance goes on.

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*Rev'd David Curry, Chaplain
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