

*“In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer,
I have overcome the world”*

At last, you say! At last, your parents and grandparents say! At last, the last day of your high school career, we all say! At last, the last Chapel service, too, you say, and like you, perhaps, I don't know whether to be happy or sad! Perhaps both. For without becoming sentimental, there is something quite poignant and moving for us all upon these occasions.

Today is your graduation day! Today you step up and step out! Today you are the pride of King's-Edgehill School, the pride of your teachers and coaches and friends, the pride of your fathers and mothers; it is a pride, too, in which I personally share. There is a wonderful sense of accomplishment and completion in this time of endings and beginnings.

The last day? Yes. A time of leaving? Yes. And yet, it is also a time of beginnings, and profoundly so. This is a day not just of endings but of beginnings which challenge us to think about what lasts - about what stays with us - on this last day and beyond. *“I will not leave you comfortless”*, Jesus says; without strength, he means, the strength of the Holy Spirit, to take the next step and to move on, the strength to begin again by continuing to build upon the foundations that belong to the intention and the purpose of King's-Edgehill School. Such, in part, is your graduation.

Encaenia is the word for this service, even as commencement is the word for the Headmaster's remarks later this morning. Both words speak of a sense of beginning by way of honouring the principles that last, the principles that inform the life and purpose of the School. Encaenia is a Greek word (εν & καινοσ) referring to a dedication festival, to a renewal of a sense of purpose and identity. Used with respect to the anniversary dedication of temples and churches, it has its further application to *“the annual commemoration of founders and benefactors at Oxford University in June”*(O.E.D.) and, by extension to many other schools and colleges throughout the world, such as King's-Edgehill here in Windsor. We are all part of something much larger than ourselves.

We salute you and celebrate your accomplishments on this day, to be sure, but we do so within the parameters of something larger than yourselves, something larger than all of us really. That something larger is the school in the integrity of its intellectual and spiritual principles that are themselves larger than the school. We meet here in this chapel where so many have met who have gone forth from this school before you.

“You are here to kneel”, as T.S. Eliot puts it, *“where prayer has been valid”* and where *“the communication of the dead is tongued by fire beyond the language of the living”*. And it is our hope and prayer that something of the educational purpose and intent of this school will remain with you, that something has been learned morally and intellectually, socially and spiritually. These are the lessons belonging to the education of character, at once the

counter and the corrective to a merely instrumental and utilitarian approach, which turns education into a consumer product, into a means to an end, rather than an activity that has its own integrity. Such are the lessons that continue to be learned, even at the eleventh hour, even in the years ahead, even in the face of each and every adversity. Such is the education that lasts because we are renewed in the principles that abide, the tempests and the tribulations of life notwithstanding.

"How came we ashore?" asks Miranda of her magus-father, Prospero. "By providence divine", he replies, suggesting that out of the tempests of life both past and future there may be found a great good, indeed, as Ariel puts it, "a sea change/ Into something rich and strange". The tempests are within and without. They have to do with the circumstances of our world and day as well as the disorders in our own souls. In just the same way, Jesus says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation", both through our own doings and through what comes upon us.

It is not a maybe. It is a promise. And don't we know it! What kind of a world are you stepping up into? Nothing less than a world of tribulation: SARS, Mad Cow Disease, West Nile Virus, the endlessness of violence in the Middle East, the continuing atrocities in the Congo and elsewhere, the uncertainties of a post cold war world, barren seas, a polluted land and so on and so on, not to mention the tribulations which we bring upon ourselves through our own folly and mischief. But the education that lasts persists in learning through each and every tribulation, seeking the good, the true and the beautiful in whatever situation. Ultimately, that Platonic triad is taken up into the infinite life of the Trinity, the life of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

"I came forth from the Father and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father", Jesus says in the lesson which Jessica read, words which signify something of the cosmic scope of redemption, words which place us in the infinite love of God for us and with us, words which ultimately signal the purposes of God mediated to us through the public institutions of our lives and which challenge the existential pragmatism of our age. To attend to such words is to enter into a way of understanding that belongs to the education that lasts precisely in the face of the tribulations of the world.

And as the lesson from Isaiah that Liam read suggests, there is a renewal and a restoration of our humanity even out of the ruins of human folly. But it requires a return to the foundational principles of our lives so that they may live in us. They are the measure of us, not we of them. Only so can we hope to be called *"oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified"*. Once again, it is *"non nobis Domine", "not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy Name be the glory"*.

And that is, perhaps, one of the hardest lessons to learn. But it belongs, I think, to the education that lasts. There is a learning even through our mistakes and even through our folly. We may be like Caliban, Shakespeare's wild man who mistakes a drunken Stephano for a god with his liquor divine, a god of immediate and sensual pleasures.

Sometimes it seems that there are a lot of Calibans! “ ‘Ban, ‘Ban Caliban”, the original twenty-first century party man! Yet Caliban learns through his folly and says, “*I’ll be wise hereafter, / and seek for grace*”, the grace of forgiveness that redeems and restores. There is hope for us all, it seems.

We have been through so much together. We have laughed and cried, talked and walked, argued and fought, danced with lobsters and sung with Angels, wrestled with the understanding of the images of Scripture and the challenges of contemporary culture, rejoiced with one another in victory and commiserated with one another in defeat; there have been tempests and tribulations, to be sure. And all of it is part and parcel of an education that lasts, which remains with you and which grows in you because everything that we have done together has become part of you. Your graduation, in a way, is really about growing up into the things that belong to the identity and purpose of this school.

Christ’s overcoming of the world means neither our technocratic domination of the world nor a flight from the world into the spurious spiritualities of the self. It signals instead the fullest possible vindication of the idea that the world is for thought. As the poet Thomas Traherne so wonderfully and wisely puts it, “*you never enjoy the world aright unless you enjoy it in God*”. There is something to be learned that is of lasting worth. “*Live as if you were to die tomorrow*”, a thirteenth century tutor advises, but “*study as if you were to live for ever*”.

The education that lasts makes us friends in the house of intellect, friends in the continuing desire to understand and know, friends in the constant struggle to act responsibly out of what we have been given to see and learn. We bid you adieu, or as Atziri would say, *Adios Amigos!* Go to God, Go with God, but remain as friends in the house of intellect, come what may in the tempests of life.

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*Rev’d David Curry
Chaplain
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