

**Heathwood Hall Episcopal School
Commencement Address
The Rev. Mike Kinman
Trinity Episcopal Cathedral
Columbia, SC
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What is your passion that leads you outside yourself?

What is your passion that wells up inside you when you see the image of God that is on and in each person being degraded.

Where is God moving your heart? What makes you rage? What makes you weep? What makes you want to reach out beyond yourself? Your time here at Heathwood Hall has given you as great a sense of the world beyond these walls and of what is inside of you as any school in the nation.

So what is it? What's your passion that leads you outside yourself?

(Start snapping finger every three seconds)

Do you know what this is. This is the sound of a child dying. A child dies every three seconds of preventable treatable causes. There's one. There's another. Somebody's sister. Somebody's friend. ¹

What do they die of? Seriously, that's not a rhetorical question. You thought you were done with tests? Not so fast! What did they die of?

-AIDS² – 1400 die a day, 2000 new infections a day, by 2010 more than 25 million AIDS orphans. More than 1 million children in Africa are living with HIV.

-Malaria³ – 3000 children die a day – that's 7 jumbo jets full of children for lack of a \$5 bednet or a 50 cent dose of medication

-Diarrhea⁴ – more than 6,000 die a day – more than have ever been killed by SARS.

-Measles⁵ – more than 2700 die a day

¹ <http://www.one.org/gvideo/view/1>

² For more information on the HIV/AIDS pandemic go to www.theglobalfund.org/en/about/aids/default.asp. A great organization to support in combating the AIDS pandemic is the Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance – www.thegaia.org.

³ For more information about malaria go to www.who.int/topics/malaria/en/. One of the best organizations both at delivering bednets and ensuring that they are used properly is NetsForLife, learn more at www.netsforlifeafrica.org.

⁴ For more information about diarrhea in the developing world go to www.faaq.org/nutrition/Diab-Em/Diarrhea.html. For an excellent organization working on clean water go to www.cleanwaterfund.org.

⁵ For more information about measles (and other diseases) in the developing world go to www.alertnet.org/topkillerdiseases.htm. For an organization doing wonderful work in

200 million children go to bed hungry every night⁶

120 million children are not in school⁷

Global warming and climate change are threatening to irreparably damage our planet.⁸

In the world as a whole, women comprise 51 percent of the population, do 66 percent of the work, receive 10 percent of the income and own less than one percent of the property.⁹

And it doesn't stop there.

Let me tell you about Mohammed. Mohammed is 17 years old and lives in Baghdad where he is a contributor to a blog set up by a former UN aid worker who gives young Iraqis a way to have their voices heard on the internet¹⁰ – to tell the story of Iraq that wouldn't get told any other way.

I met Mohammed four months ago when I used one of his blog posts¹¹ in a sermon and posted it on my blog¹². A quick trackback pointed him my way and we started a conversation. He's a Shiite Muslim. I'm a Christian. He's an Iraqi. I'm an American. The aid worker set up a password protected site where we could trade posts and nobody could see (you see, his name really isn't Mohammed, he can't use his real name for security reasons). We are so different. But we began to become friends.

immunization in the developing world visit the website of the Sabin Vaccine Institute - www.sabin.org.

⁶ Bread for the World is an excellent source of information on hunger – as well as a great way to get involved in lobbying efforts to eradicate it. Go to www.bread.org. Also check out the food security programs run by Episcopal Relief and Development at www.erd.org/programs_41315_ENG_HTM.htm.

⁷ Learn more about universal primary education and what you can do at www.mdgs.e4gr.org/education.html. Also check out the Global Campaign for Education - www.campaignforeducation.org. And for a great program that looks beyond just primary education, learn about (and support) Orphans of Rwanda - www.orphansofrwanda.org.

⁸ A great one-stop site on this is Al Gore's site -- www.climatecrisis.net. Discover your own effect on the environment (and what you can do about it) at www.carbonfootprint.com.

⁹ Educating and empowering women is the single most important factor in development. CARE is a leader in this movement with their "I Am Powerful" campaign. Find out more at www.care.org. For great stories of women and children transforming the world, subscribe to the free online e-zine "World Pulse Magazine" at www.worldpulsemagazine.com.

¹⁰ <http://gorillasguides.com/>

¹¹ <http://gorillasguides.com/2007/02/14/things-of-infinite-importance/#more-766>

¹² <http://revmikek.blogspot.com/2007/02/what-will-we-talk-about-today-you-and-i.html>

In early March, I got an email from the aid worker. Mohammed's parents were killed when suicide bombers attacked the pilgrimage procession they were on¹³. A few days earlier, Mohammed's older brother had been killed as he ran into the scene of a bombing to rescue survivors. It was something called a cascaded bombing attack – in other words more than one bomb, the second one being timed to kill the rescuers and people fleeing the scene. Mohammed's other brother, Ali, was wounded in the pilgrimage with his parents but was physically recovered enough so that he and Mohammed could continue the pilgrimage on foot to finish what their parents were doing. Ali is 8 years old. Mohammed is now the head of his family. He's 17. Born in another place, he could have been sitting right here with you.

Maybe you haven't heard these statistics and these stories before, but I can't believe any of this is really news to you. Not after the education you have received here. Not in a school that established the Invisible Children¹⁴ club to aid the Acholi children of Northern Uganda. Not for those of you who have taken the Global Studies class. Or have gone on the Winterim international trips. Or even closer to home what you experienced on the trip to John's Island.

I'm pretty sure that ignorance of the world is not an issue here.

So what is it for you? What story has moved you? What relationship do you want to honor? What is your passion that leads you outside yourself?

So I want you to take just a minute and search your heart. This isn't about depressing you but getting you to think of the possibilities. Think of the brokenness in the world. Think of what you have learned about it during your years here at Heathwood Hall or even maybe something that I said in the past two minutes. Think of one thing that particularly struck you, that moved you. Maybe it's children dying of malaria 'cause they don't have a \$5 bed net or girls who can't go to school because their family can't afford the uniform and books. Maybe it's stopping a war or stopping global warming. What is it for you? What strikes a chord in your heart?

On the ends of the pews you'll find note cards and pencils. Pass those down so everyone gets one. And when you have that one word or phrase or sentence that describes your passion, I want you to take that card and pencil and write it down.

I'll give you a minute.

(pause)

You've learned a lot in your time here at Heathwood Hall, but I want to tell you one more thing. Maybe you knew it already.

¹³ A Boston Globe story of the attack is here -

www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2007/03/06/suicide_bombers_massacre_shiite_pilgrims/

¹⁴ www.invisiblechildren.com

There's a difference between belief and faith. There's a difference between thinking something is true up here, and putting your life in its hands. Let me tell you a story¹⁵.

There once was a man who was a great tightrope walker, and word got out one day that he was going to stretch a line across Niagara Falls and walk from one end to the other. And so a great crowd gathered to watch this amazing event. And the man stood at the end of the rope and said "Do you think I can walk from one end of this rope to the other and back again, across this raging falls." And there was silence because the crowd didn't think he could do it.

And the man stepped out – and he walked across the falls and he turned around and walked back again. And the crowd went wild.

"Now," He yelled down to the crowd. "Do you think I can walk from one end of this rope to the other and back again, across the raging falls – blindfolded." And this time from the crowd, who was beginning to believe in this man, 10 or 12 voices came out shouting "Yes, we believe." And the man said, "Great!"

And the man put the blindfold on and stepped out – and he walked across the falls and he turned around and walked back again. And again the crowd went wild.

"Now," He yelled down to the crowd. "Do you think I can walk from one end of this rope to the other and back again, across the raging falls – blindfolded and pushing this wheelbarrow!" By this time the crowd was really getting worked up, and immediately from down below came all these shouts of "Yes, we do." "Yes, we believe." And the man said, "Great!"

And the man put the blindfold on, grabbed the wheelbarrow in front of him and he stepped out – and blindfolded and pushing that wheelbarrow he walked across the falls and he turned around and walked back again. And the crowd was about ready to explode.

"Now," He yelled down to the crowd. "Do you think I can walk from one end of this rope to the other and back again, across the raging falls – blindfolded and pushing the wheelbarrow with somebody in the wheelbarrow?" And the crowd with one loud voice shouted up to him, "Yes, we believe." And the man said, "Great!"

"Do I have a volunteer?"

There's a difference between belief and faith. There's a difference between thinking something is true up here, and putting your life in its hands. That's faith.

Being a commencement speaker is a particular challenge because not only am I pretty much the last man standing between you all and a really great party, but I've sat out there ... I KNOW you go into commencement addresses pretty much figuring you know what I'm gonna say. A lot of times, it's going to be some variation on believe in yourself and you can accomplish anything.

¹⁵ I heard this story in a sermon by the Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, Bishop of North Carolina, at the Episcopal Urban Caucus Assembly in 2007. Bishop Curry credited hearing it from The Rev. Ed Rodman of the Diocese of Massachusetts. Beyond that, it's anyone's guess!

Well, I'm not going to tell you to believe in yourself. In fact, I'm not interested in your believing in yourself or really what you *believe* in or *if you believe* in *anything*. What I want to invite you, to challenge you to do is to have *faith*. What I want to invite you, to challenge you to live is a life of faith, 'cause that's the life worth living.

I want to invite you, to challenge you to get in that wheelbarrow.

So what does that mean?

There's a man named Chris Argyris¹⁶ at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard who has done research into what he calls Real Work Values. We all have things that we SAY that we value, what we SAY drives our actions – things that sound good to ourselves and to others -- but Chris has found that there are three values that REALLY drive us ... and they cut across all cultures.

First – maximize winning and minimize losing.

Second – maximize success and minimize failure.

Third – Appear rational.

Got that?

These are the things that deep down really motivate us and, left unchecked, will always guide our actions. The interesting thing is that these work values are not helpful. They prevent us from taking chances. They prevent innovation that involves any type of risk. Other than your basic self-preservation instinct and acrophobia, they're what keeps us from getting in that wheelbarrow. And I would guess that the most important one for many people – I know it is for me – is the last one – appear rational. I don't want anyone thinking I'm naïve or unbalanced or anything less than reasoned and in control

John's Gospel talks about the world "hating" us for the sake of the Gospel¹⁷. I don't think that's the worst case scenario. When you're hated, you can get that us against the world, back-against-the-wall thing going. You know, if they're shooting at you, you must be doing something right – and you can draw your strength from that. What I think is closer for us to what Jesus was talking about is the world thinking we're crazy. When people hate you, you've got a fight on your hands – and mostly we know how to deal with fights.

But when people think you're crazy, I mean absolutely bonkers, they just shake their head and dismiss you, refuse to take you seriously, and worst of all they give each other those sideglances that cut the heart out of your sense of self. Hate me, fine ... but don't call me crazy.

And that's a problem for us. And it's one we've really gotta get over. Because I'm here to tell you this morning that Christ calls us to be a little bit nutty. Living a life of faith is about not minding if people call you crazy – or at least trying not to mind and not letting the fact that you still do mind stop you.

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Argyris

¹⁷ John 15:18-25 - <http://bible.oremus.org/?q=47974525>

Think about it! Who was the single most effective person as a catalyst for global change in the history of humanity? Jesus of Nazareth. Seriously, even putting religious considerations aside, you cannot name one person who has had a greater effect on the history of the world than this itinerant rabbi from some backwater of the Roman Empire.

And you know how he did it? He saw a broken world and loved it the best he could. He let God love the world through him – and he didn't care who called him crazy in the process. Some people followed him and some people ridiculed him, some people called him nuts and some people feared him ... and the ones that feared him ended up arresting him, whipping him and nailing him to a cross to die but no matter. He saw a broken world and loved it the best he could. He let God love the world through him ... and he didn't care who called him crazy in the process.

That's our role model. Jesus. That's who our charge comes from. In our baptismal liturgy, before we even get to the statement of belief and the baptismal covenant we have three renunciations and three what are called "adhesions."¹⁸ The renunciations are about renouncing the evil powers of the world and everything that draws us away from God. And then the adhesions, the things we attach, we adhere to ourselves are about what we take on. And after we pledge to follow Christ, we are asked this question: Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?

What a question that is! What an invitation into a life of loving the world and not caring what people think. I tell you I reaffirm those vows every morning and that question never fails to give me pause.

Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?

Or put another way ... Do I have a volunteer?

If this really is a commencement – a beginning – that's the question for us. If this really is a beginning, this is the kind of life we are challenged to begin.

And where do you begin? You begin is by having faith that in that word or words that you have on that card in your hand, God has implanted a vision and a call in your heart. 'Cause that card in your hand is your passion ... and author Frederick Buechner¹⁹ got it right when he said that God's call is "where your passion and the world's deep need meet."

So I've got a little wheelbarrow to invite you into right now. Can someone share with me what they wrote? Do I have a volunteer?

(several students volunteered their passions – representing a broad range of global and local concerns)

So how do we get started. How do you get in the wheelbarrow?

¹⁸ www.saintgabriels.org/bcp/bap.html

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Buechner

Well there's lots of ways, and I'm going to start with the one that needs to undergird everything we do -- prayer.²⁰

We tend to talk about prayer all wrong. We talk about prayer as if it's the last resort ... "well, I guess all that's left to do now is pray." That's dead wrong. Prayer is the FIRST thing we do. You see, prayer isn't bringing a laundry list of concerns to God and saying "Hey, God, this stuff is bugging me ... could you do something about it." When we pray with this stuff, we are going into the presence of God with the world on our hearts and saying "God, use me. God, you know this brokenness in the world. Open me up. Use me to heal it. Use me to love this broken world." If you pray, the next steps will be revealed to you. They may not always be where you want to go ... but a path will be shown.

Next – educate yourself.²¹ Become an expert on whatever your passion is. Don't depend on watching network TV news 'cause you won't find what you need there. But search out in unexpected places everything you can discover. Find people who have lived it and are living it. Learn everything you can possibly learn so you can turn around and educate others so that their hearts can be moved as your heart has been moved.

Advocacy.²² Not all of you are 18 yet and have the vote but, God willing, you all will be soon. One of the greatest powers you have is that vote. Eradicating extreme poverty isn't going to happen without our government making some serious changes in things like debt and trade and aid. Learn who your senators and representatives are and make sure they know who you are. Learn how to send emails to them. Make appointments to see them and tell them about your passion and that if they want your vote, they need to care about what you care about.

Giving.²³ You are citizens of the richest nation in the history of the world. If we are to remedy the incredible inadequacies between rich and poor on this planet, we are going to have to learn to follow Christ's model of greatness that comes from service and generosity. Get into a habit of giving. And do it right now ... because if you don't get in the habit of giving outside yourself, of dedicating your wealth to healing with world, if you don't do it now you won't ever do it. No matter how much or how little you are making, give out of it to make the world better.

²⁰ For prayer resources for global poverty go to <http://pray.e4gr.org/index.html>.

²¹ An excellent place to start is the book "What Can One Person Do? Faith to Heal a Broken World" by Sabina Alkire and Edmund Newell. Easy to read, engaging, great stories & questions ... and plenty of ideas of where you can begin. Find it at www.whatcanonepersondo.org/Book.htm. For other excellent books go to <http://mdgtoolkit.e4gr.org/bookstore.html>. For online learning, spend some time on the Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation site – www.e4gr.org – and blog – www.e4gr.blogspot.com.

²² If you haven't already, join the ONE Campaign- www.one.org and the Episcopal Public Policy Network – www.episcopalchurch.org/eppn. Also Bread for the World – www.bread.org – and DATA (Bono's organization) – www.data.org have excellent resources on political advocacy.

²³ Learn about giving for the Millennium Development Goals at <http://give.e4gr.org/index.html>. Join Kiva -- www.kiva.org – for a great way to support microfinance from your desktop. Looking for a charity that meets your passion? Go to www.charitynavigator.org – they have an amazing searchable database of thousands of charities, ranked for effectiveness – and with tons of information.

Build relationships.²⁴ Seek out people who are from the places you wish to engage. Get online and meet people. Find the people at your colleges and universities from around the world and be their friends. Seek out communities of immigrants and refugees in your city and learn from them.

Finally, travel.²⁵ You have more opportunities for travel than any generation in history. Only 7 percent of Americans have a passport and have used it. I'll bet more than 7 percent of you have a passport and have used it. You are going to have opportunities to study abroad and to travel to places that will broaden your mind and deepen your heart. And seek out especially those places that make you nervous, that feel like you're stepping off that cliff and into that wheelbarrow ... 'cause that's where God really gets to work on you.

You want to know the truth? The truth is this is a gathering of some of the most powerful people in the world. If not you, who? If not now, when? People will tell you that your importance is that you are the future but I am here to say that your moment is now. The civil rights movement in this country was begun and sustained by college students.²⁶ I am in the job I am in now talking to you because I was inspired by Episcopal college students who went to Africa and did AIDS education and cared for orphans. How many of you are on MySpace or Facebook? Networks of relationship that are changing how the world works are being built and maintained and grown by high school and college students.

Look at the words on that card. I want you to keep that card. I want you to put it on your mirror or take a picture of it and put it on your MySpace page or FaceBook profile.

Look at the words on that card. If not you, who? If not now, when?

I know that today feels like an ending, but it really is a beginning. You will go somewhere new and have a great chance to continue to make yourself or even to remake yourself.

So what's it gonna be?

Will you stand below and watch and cheer and say "yes, I believe" while others take the lead.

²⁴ Check out these sites for global networking: Chat The Planet - www.chattheplanet.com. TakingItGlobal - www.takingitglobal.org. Also, see if your diocese has a companion relationship - http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79704_81769_ENG_HTM.htm

²⁵ Check into study abroad opportunities at your school. Also look at the Episcopal Young Adult Service Corps - www.episcopalchurch.org/30703_1700_ENG_HTM.htm and the Lutheran Global Mission Service - www.elca.org/globalserve/youngadults/index.html.

²⁶ If I had to choose one book for every incoming college freshman to read it would be The Children by David Halberstam – the compelling story of the college students who were the backbone of the civil rights movement. Read it – it will show you what is possible. It's at Amazon at www.amazon.com/Children-David-Halberstam/dp/0449004392

Or will you consider your call. Will you do what your time at this amazing school has prepared you to do? Will you look at the continue to listen for that place where your passion and the world's deep needs meet and will you follow it to the ends of the earth. Will you love this broken world not caring who thinks you're nuts in the process. Will you get into that wheelbarrow.

Do I have a volunteer?