

Chapel Talk
Michael C. Schuller
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“Life is but a dream...”

Once in a while, I make it a point to break out of my work routine and go to a workshop, breakfast meeting, or lecture to learn something new or gain perspective on my experiences -- or more often these days, to be reminded of things I once knew to be true and valuable, but have since forgotten. While most of you are too young to have the need for such refreshment, do not neglect the opportunity to do something different and try something new -- you never know what will stick and change your view of the world, or even the course of your life. Mr. Burk touted Naomi Wolf’s lecture in February at the University of Pennsylvania in that light. A number of you benefited from that, but for those of you who didn’t, fear not: this place is rife with similar opportunities -- but you do need to go out of your way to take advantage of them.

My talk this evening centers on one such experience for me. Unfortunately, I do not remember the specifics of the occasion, including the name of the University of New Hampshire professor who shared the wisdom and perspective that has stuck with me since I attended that early morning breakfast workshop nearly two decades ago. Chances are that the same thing may happen to some of you -- you will probably not remember my name* or even perhaps where you first heard this different perspective on an old nursery rhyme – but whenever you hear it again, I hope it may cause you to pause and think of some of the deeper lessons contained, innocently, in its verse. It goes like this:

“Row, row, row your boat...”

An apt metaphor for this School, don’t you think? Even those of you who are not involved in the crew program know that rowing a boat is hard work; at least earnest rowing is. Think of the boat as your vessel of life -- powering it on your journey is not easy. M. Scott Peck, the noted psychologist and author, writes “Where do people get the idea that life is supposed to be easy? Once people grasp that life is inherently difficult, addressing their problems becomes much simpler.” Life is *hard*; get used to it. Persevere.

Another neat aspect of this metaphor about rowing and life is that when you row, you normally can't see where you're going! Life is that way too...the path ahead of you is rarely clearly visible. To steer a steady course on the Pond, you need help from a cox; in life, this help may come from a parent (God forbid!), an advisor, roommate, sibling or friend. Listen; let them help you: they may well keep you from running aground unnecessarily.

“Gently down the stream...”

Gentility these days is apparently a lost art, and in my opinion a vastly underrated one. In the face of life's challenges, there are many people around you who can help you bloom and grow. Be kind to them, and they will be kind to you. Even the most decorated individuals, sports heroes and political leaders know that their success has emerged and is dependent on others – a team effort. You are fortunate here at St. Andrew's to have such overt exhibitions of such truths early in your lives; don't miss this lesson. Your journey, as you already know, won't be entirely on a nice smooth Pond: currents, eddies and back-waters will throw you off course and pose considerable challenges – but with help from others, and the grace of God, you can move past or through those, and continue gently on your way.

“Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily...”

Ah, now this is a tricky part. My own kids are a little tired of hearing this, and I can't say I've perfected it myself, but I try -- Life is all about attitude!

You're probably familiar with the phrase: “When life hands you a bowl of lemons, make lemonade.” Or in our case, “Maron-ade:” when Rachel was disqualified from the state diving meet by inadvertently leaving her elastic hair band on her wrist, she stoically held her head high and cheered on her teammates, when most mortals would have been lost in the personal frustration and disappointment of such a small technicality ruining the potential culmination of all her hard work and high school diving career. But life is not about winning medals, and Rachel reminded us all of that so beautifully: her grace under pressure will far outshine any medal she might have won that night.

It's all about how you handle the ups and downs, the tough times and the good times, the gifts and the handicaps. A positive attitude not only lifts your own spirits and outlook; it lifts those

around you -- and frankly makes you much more pleasant to be around. It's a very reliable formula; just try it. And it keeps on working, as long as you keep working at it.

“Life is but a dream...”

Aha! Buried in an innocent nursery rhyme is life's most intriguing question: What is life all about? Why are we here? Is this just a stage or is this “it”? As Christians we have certain convictions and beliefs – but who knows for sure... *Is* it all a dream? If so, it's a humdinger – full of challenges, opportunities, uncertainties, and the potential for unusual levels of fulfillment.

So my counsel is simple:

- Apply yourself – constantly and consistently; row that boat for all you're worth!
- Be kind and considerate of yourself and those around you; go gently along your way.
- Hold your head high when the tide turns against you; smile a lot and share positively what you've learned and the gifts you've been given.

Verily and merrily these things will come back to you in spades -- and your life will be a dream!

Best wishes in *your* journey and Godspeed along your way.

* I have this on good authority actually from a number of alumni I've met over my years here, who, graciously trying to identify with my role in the Business Office, search their memory banks for the name of the Business Manager when they were here, but more often than not end up scratching their heads and mumbling something about him having been a “good guy.”