

“Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” These words, spoken by President John F. Kennedy, offer a truly poignant observation applicable to our mission here today. Kennedy clearly meant to warn against dwelling on the past in fear of overlooking what is to come. *We* have accepted the change that is a product of our graduation. Today though, we are called to reflect on the past and ascertain how we came to this present moment, as a means of plotting our own course for the future. We will not dwell, but rather identify those experiences that will continue to inspire us to succeed.

It is no secret that today marks a pivotal day in the lives of the students anticipating the long awaited walk across this stage. Right now we are *defined*, quite simply, as students. In just a few moments, with diploma in hand, we will be known as graduates.

We cannot escape such definitions and the many implications that accompany them. As freshman we were, no matter how prepared we thought ourselves to be, the new and naïve faces on the block. We fought to define ourselves by joining various organizations, rushing a Greek house, or by working through the process of declaring a major. As sophomores, our time seemed to be defined for us. Some of us braved the murky waist-deep waters of the flood to save our own belongings as well as the hopes and will of members of the Marietta community. Others grieved together after the tragic loss of an influential campus figure and friend. We learned the value of resolve. We had no choice and pushed on.

As juniors, some of us worked through the process of landing the elusive internship or summer job. We filled positions of leadership on campus. We were busy with the task of preparing ourselves for the future. For some, this was still a daunting idea to consider. For others, the progression was all too logical.

As seniors, we had this school thing down pat. We still had the same pressures, if not more at times. We were working on our definitions of self by preparing for graduate school exams. Others tackled the job search in hopes of contributing to society as soon as possible. Others still continued to foster the relationships that will last long after we leave here today. Despite these responsibilities, however, an end was in sight. We had made it this far and there was no stopping us.

And now, today, we are graduates. Listen again. *Graduates*. It's a label we've been working towards for years. The funny thing about the title, though, is that it is good only for today. Bask in it. Enjoy it. Seize this day. Today is our day, but tomorrow, more than ever, is truly the beginning of the rest of our lives. We will always have the privilege of saying, "I graduated from Marietta College," but after today, we will be alumni, engineers, broadcasters, athletes, husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, and most importantly, equipped with the tools to do most anything.

Therein lies the common dilemma. Many of us, along with recent graduates across the

country, are looking for something to do. It will be vital, though, for this Marietta College class of 2007 to take the extra, often more intangible step. We must challenge ourselves, and *define* ourselves, as a class that didn't just *look for something to do*, but rather looked *to do something that matters*.

It's no secret that many of us are excited to embark on the next stage of our lives. We cannot forget, however, the lessons we learned on this campus as we prepare for our future endeavors. Those of us ready for this step can often be heard griping about the small, sometimes claustrophobic environment common to institutions this size. Through this environment, though, we had four years to realize and exercise the importance of community. We found out, in one way or another, that what we do will always affect those around us. We learned the value of personal responsibility as we engaged in experiences in which others relied on us. It wasn't always easy and in fact, there were times when we certainly didn't like it, but we are now all prepared to carry these lessons into everything we do. The values and virtues we learned both in and out of the classroom will be the foundation for how we will *define* ourselves.

This is no small task, however. In fact, the odds are against us. Jedediah Purdy, author of a social commentary titled For Common Things, has strong opinions about our generation's ability to make a difference in our nation's public. "We can hardly say what good politics is: how it serves others, how it enhances its practitioners, or what standards of excellence it could hope to meet," Purdy says. He continues noting that, "we cannot,

in effect, say what politics is for¹.” I think Purdy’s point is clear. We are largely seen as a generation uninterested in preserving the value of community or serving others. To Purdy, we have become so disillusioned with the politics and administration of our society that we simply don’t care enough to make real change.

I do not intend to charge this class with the duty of one day running for office. It should be noted, however, that the public official was once looked upon with a great deal of respect and was, by most accounts, considered a member of the nobility. Public servants were the leaders of yesteryear who carried the hopes and welfare of the people they represented proudly on their backs.

Many of us came to college with the goal of obtaining that piece of paper that will hang on the wall, and see education as a means to a better, more secure future. We operate in this way largely out of necessity; we understand the competitiveness of the job market, and we have realized that comfortable living is largely the result of hard work.

My wish for this class is to translate the lessons we learned in this college community into a means to do something that matters. We have the tools, the knowledge, and the understanding to change the classification of our generation that has been thrust upon us. Only a few of us will ever run for public office, but all of us will leave equipped with a liberal arts education that has furthered our appreciation of diversity and the minutiae of a world of work that is a product of globalization. We will go on with the capacity to

¹ For Common Things. Jedediah Purdy.

engage ourselves in the work it takes to be informed, vital, and contributing members of our society. *We* are the petroleum engineers that will lead the way to the responsible utilization of our nation's energy resources. *We* are the future executives of major advertising firms that will determine how individuals contribute to our economy. *We* are the future educators of our nation's children, and the future dedicated and loving parents of those children. We are a class with the ability to make a concerted effort to take on the politics of community; that is, concerning ourselves with the affairs that affect those around us. If we each choose to define ourselves in this way, this class will surely leave a benchmark of excellence for years to come.

Remember the words of President Kennedy. *We will not* miss the future, because we have accepted the change we experienced in the last four years, and embrace those experiences as essential to the ways we have defined ourselves today. Tomorrow, as we lunge into this new phase of our lives, we can, and will, go confidently as educated, ready and able *recent* graduates of Marietta College.