



2016 Grove City College Opening Convocation
by
President Paul J. McNulty

On behalf of the Board and fellow administrators, I extend my warmest welcome to students, faculty, staff and the entire Grove City College community.

We stand at the threshold of another academic year, filled with anticipation for all the promise and challenge a new year brings. It's appropriate that we once again take a relatively brief moment on this second day of classes to acknowledge our great God, who is the source of all knowledge and wisdom and the Might One on whom we most certainly depend for our every success.

As we just sang, "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing; were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he." What a great note on which to start the year!

What Keeps You up at Night?

For the past nine years I've been working with business leaders and corporate officials to strengthen ethics and compliance programs. There's an expression they often use to describe their fear of serious misconduct by employees. They say, "This is what keeps me up at night." They are referring to big risks that if not properly managed could result in enormous financial and reputational harm (not to mention personal professional disaster). I'm talking specifically about legal risks, rather than operational risks or strategic risks (which can also lead to insomnia).

For example, a company wins a major contract to build critical infrastructure in a developing country (that's good), but bribes were paid to key government officials to secure the business (that's bad). Dozens and dozens of companies have been prosecuted for this behavior and have paid tens or in some cases hundreds of millions of dollars in penalties. That's a risk that would keep any conscientious corporate official up at night.

So what should keep the college community up at night? What keeps me up at night, I mean other than living less than 50yds from a men's dormitory? The budget? Enrollment? Our independence and religious freedom?

Be Anxious for Nothing

This is not really a fair question in one sense because the follower of Christ is clearly instructed in the Scriptures not to be anxious for anything, instead we should bring all of our concerns to God in prayer and let the peace of Christ reign in our hearts. (Phil 4:6,7)

Jesus asked, "Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his life?...Your heavenly Father knows what you need, so seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matt 6)

So ultimately we are called to trust God, and we know He is faithful and worthy of our trust. The Psalmist says: "In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety." (Ps 4:8)

OK, so we have good reason to sleep at night, but there are real risks that await us in the morning. We face real risks particularly because of our sinful nature. We are warned repeatedly to be on our guard, to watch how we walk lest we give way to temptation of every sort. We know the power of our pride to pull us into needless disputes and controversies, to promote sinful divisions within the body of Christ. And perhaps most troubling, we know how our pride can lead to hypocrisy, where our outward persona appears to be religious, but our hearts are unyielding to God's true will for our lives.

The Greatest Risk of All

This very real risk of counterfeit Christianity is spelled out in our text this morning. Jesus describes the worst thing that could ever happen: believing that you are right with God, but finding out when it's too late that you're not.

This is worse than not believing at all. The non-believer has no expectations of eternal fellowship with Christ. (Ex: It's like a family attending the Olympic Games and discovering they have counterfeit tickets.)

Listen again to what Jesus is saying:

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord,” did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”

Tim Keller preached a sermon on this text several years ago. He said that as we read these words carefully “little beads of sweat start to pop out on our foreheads.” Why? Keller points out that the people being turned away are: 1) orthodox in doctrine (Jesus is “Lord”); 2) emotionally involved (“Lord, Lord”) means in the original language that the speaker is placing great emphasis on his statement); and 3) active in service (prophesying and doing mighty works). They looked the part. They used the label of Christian. It was in their promotional materials. It was part of their tag line. You couldn't miss it in their brochures.

Where did they go wrong? What are they missing? Jesus declares that they were not doing the will of his Father in Heaven. They were completely caught up in pursuing their own agendas and not God's commands.

This is one of Christ's hard teachings. We are challenged to examine carefully what sits at the center of our religious identity. Are we Christ-centered or merely relying on the outward trappings of Christianity? This reminds us of the indictment of God's people in the Old Testament. Recall when God spoke through Isaiah declaring that He takes no delight in their sacrifices; they have become a burden to Him. Instead, He says learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. It also brings to mind when Samuel rebuked Saul and said to obey is better than sacrifice.

God's Will for Our Lives – The Key to Being Authentically Christian

So if we're to avoid hypocrisy and being satisfied with only the veneer of faith, what does it mean to do, in Jesus' words, the will of my Father who is in Heaven? Jesus demonstrated the answer for us in the garden when he prayed, "not as I will, but your will be done." He went to the cross in obedience to His Father's will.

And as consequence of this obedience, we can embrace the calling Paul sets before us in his letter to the Romans: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Paul also wrote to the Colossians that he continuously prayed for them to "be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Rom. 12:2, Col. 1:9,10)

Therefore, with renewed minds, seeking to be filled with the knowledge of his will, what do we find in His word? We find the Shema from Deut. 6: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." We also find Christ's pronouncement of the Greatest Commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all of the Law and the Prophets."

This is the calling of authentic Christianity: knowing and doing the will of God. It's much more than an orthodox religion or conservative worldview. It's not just about serving those in need or caring compassionately for social justice, and it's certainly not just about being tied to a Christian tradition and surrounded by symbols of Christianity. Authentic Christianity is, by the grace of God, an uncompromising and self-denying commitment to being a disciple of Christ which includes living a life of loving service to others.

What Does This Mean for Grove City College

First, let us be reminded of the risk – the risk to be satisfied with only the outward trappings of faith. Faith matters because Christ matters.

We've identified this institution as Christian from the beginning. Isaac Ketler spoke of four distinctives. One of them is this: "Grove City College is undenominational but Christian. It holds to the orthodox faith of evangelical Christianity and furnishes daily instruction in the Bible by men who believe in the Bible and who seek to magnify the Word of God in their teaching."

More than one hundred years after Isaac Ketler wrote these words, we have a Chapel program, inspiring symbols and biblical language on buildings, beautiful stained glass windows, and many different religious traditions. These are all fine things. Over the years we've used a variety of good words to describe our commitment to the Christian religion. We've talked about Christian principles, environment, atmosphere. More recently, we've used the word "authentic."

Regardless of how we describe our convictions, Christ must be at the center of our every endeavor. He is the one through whom all things were made, and in him all things hold together. (Col. 1:16, 17) Jesus

said, “Whoever sees me sees him who sent me.” (John 12:45) Doing the will of his Father in Heaven means being devoted to Christ. If anything should keep us up at night, it’s missing this point.

In his book Conceiving the Christian College former Wheaton President Duane Litfin wrote: The best motives for Christian scholarship are thus the most personal ones. These motives do not stem first and foremost from a set of abstract beliefs or a system of thought, or even from the most unselfish aspirations for transforming our culture. Neither are they expression of our commitment to some particular set of Christian “virtues,” or “values,” or “Judeo-Christian principles.” Our motives grow out of nothing so abstract or depersonalized as dedication to “our Christian heritage,” or “the Christian tradition,” or “a Christian vision.” Nor are they prompted by a vague institutional desire to “maintain a Christian environment” that is somehow even more vaguely, “informed by the Christian faith.” Each of these good things, captured in phrases culled from institutional mission statements, may best be viewed as derived from something deeper. They are penultimate things, but they are not, must not be, cannot be, the Christian’s bedrock. Rightly understood, each is a worthy byproduct of that most fundamental thing: our allegiance to a person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, let us be renewed in our commitment to Christ’s commands. Authentic Christianity is about both truth and justice. We’re called to nothing less than loving God with all of our heart, soul and mind and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

The reason my clients had trouble sleeping is that they know a major legal violation could seriously harm their company’s brand. Our brand at Grove City College should be humility and a genuine desire to know God’s truth. It should also be civility – an unmistakable respect for the value and dignity of every person. Loving God and loving each other – that’s what really matters.

So let us be clear as we begin this new academic year, 140 years from the first small gathering of students on lower campus. We are Grove City College, a Christ-centered, private liberal arts college. We exist to equip our students to pursue their unique callings for the glory of God and the common good. Our commitment to the Christian faith is not some vague heritage or set of comforting traditions. Our commitment is to God’s will, whatever the demands.

Members of the faculty and fellow employees of the college, this is our calling. As we interact with students every day, we should be drawing them to Christ and not merely an outward form of faith. May God give us the grace to hold fast to this profession so that we would never be found crying out in surprise and despair, “Lord, Lord, didn’t we educate in your name?” May God give us the grace to be like a house built on a rock so that when the rain and the floods come and the winds beat on us (and they will), we will not fall because we have been founded on the rock, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

** These are President McNulty’s prepared remarks. He added additional extemporaneous comments in his address.*