

Graduation Speech

— Sarah Jansen

It is an honor to speak to you today at Caritas Academy's first commencement ceremony. The two things I want to impress upon you, the graduates, the underclassmen, and us all is the imperative need to follow your passions and to do so with integrity.

A passion is an "ardent affection or love". As many of you have realized, I have a passion for biology and nature. Lisa Lam shared with me her passion for engineering management. The crew of the Timberwind, whom we met this week, must have a passion for sailing. I believe that God has given unique passions to each one of us. As we know from Psalm 139,

“...You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.

When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes say my unformed body.

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

...Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

God made us, every part of us –our bodies, our souls, our minds, our personalities, our likes and dislikes. He has given us our loves as tools to help us love Him, serve Him and our brothers and sisters, and be happy in our hearts. We are truly “fearfully and wonderfully made”.

I am fortunate to have always known what I love. I remember, when I was 5 years old, building snail gardens on the beaches of the Cape Cod National Seashore. I would collect many periwinkle snails, the little, ubiquitous snails that live on rocky and sandy beaches alike. The little ones I called the babies, and the big ones the grandfathers. Then I would make a little habitat for them with rocks, little pools of water, and seaweed. Carefully positioning the snails in my recreated seashore, I would watch them to see how they moved, if they ate, where they preferred to be.

Years later, at 18, when I arrived at college, my first lab in my introductory biology class, involved periwinkle snails. We were given trays of snail shells, some collected at rocky beaches, others on sandy shores, and a pair of calipers. We were asked to measure and record the height of the shells, the width of the shell wall, and the width of the opening, called the aperture. When we learned how to analyze this data, we saw that there were significant differences in the thickness of the shell walls. The snails from the rocky beaches had thicker shells, presumably to protect the animal inside from the rougher waves on the rocky beach, and the sandy shore snails had thinner shells. I was fascinated, and grateful to God. I felt as though my life was coming full circle –my love and passion of my childhood was being reinforced as a I was studying and

preparing to step forward into my adult life. I felt that God was giving me encouragement and confirming my desire to study biology by giving me the gift of this laboratory exercise.

Jon and David, you may not know right now what your passions are or how to integrate them into your life, but this is the time to find out. At this point you are free to find out your true loves in life. And all of you 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th graders, this is the time to find out what you love to do and how to make that a part of your life. You do not need to settle for what you think you “should” do or what you think you are “supposed to do”; you need to discover what God has given you and then discover how to use this God-given tool in your life as you peruse serving Him. You can do this by trying out as many new things as possible and seizing all opportunities that come by to do new things.

And now, in all that we do, we must do it for the glory of God. One aspect of glorifying God with our lives is to live with integrity, that is, with uprightness of character and with honesty. In Psalm 15, David describes those who find favor with God.

“Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your
 holy hill?
 He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous,
 who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his
 tongue,
 who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his
 fellowman,
 who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the Lord,
 who keeps his oath even when it hurts,
 who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe
 against the innocent.
 He who does these things will never be shaken.”

So, please seek after God, knowing that he has the best and perfect plans for you. He gave you passions that you can use to his glory. Finally, I want to remind you of God’s promise in Jeremiah 29:

“For I know the plans I have for you”, declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”