

Why are we here today?

By Emily Kornegay

Class of 2015, why are we here today? I don't mean this to be a flippant question.

I pose that question in a profoundly curious manner - - asking you to spend a few minutes reflecting with me about what it really means to be here today, gathered with friends and family, marking this milestone in our lives.

Our reason for being here today is not a singular one; there are several reasons for our presence here.

We are here to express appreciation, to celebrate accomplishments, to say tearful "good-byes," and joyously, we are also here to commence, to begin again, to look ahead at a "Brave New World" that we have previously only imagined.

While celebrating this milestone, we must remember that success is seldom a one person effort. It is important to acknowledge that what we have accomplished has not been done alone.

Our parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles, other family members, teachers, coaches, and friends have traveled with us to this place and occasion, through times both happy and sad.

Posted on the wall of this gymnasium and printed in your program today, are the words to our school's Alma mater. We have sung these words at assemblies, pep rallies and at the conclusion of football games, but how often have we taken the time to think about these words?

"Our homage we bring."

Today, we honor our high school, those teachers and administrators who bring it to life each day, and those who have gone before them to build the tradition, **the pride**, that makes us Yellow Jackets.

It is not that we have learned all that we need to know to be successful, but we have been provided a strong foundation upon which to build our future. For that we pay "homage" and say "thank you" to those who have made for us the unique experience that is a Thomas County Central High School education.

What have we learned here?

Again, our Alma mater declares, "Knowledge, truth, honor, and courage of heart." Knowledge, truth, honor, and courage are not individual qualities - - taught or learned in isolation. They form the tapestry of our character which has been woven here, in our families, and in our churches. For that we also pay homage.

We are also here to celebrate.

We celebrate completion of the prescribed curriculum required to earn the diplomas that we will receive in a few moments, but we also celebrate the victories that have been won on the athletic fields, in academic competitions, and in the classrooms by members of the class of 2015. We have the state champion in girls' extemporaneous speaking, members of the state second place softball team, several regional athletic championships, and more individual awards than there is time to mention.

It is noteworthy, that over the last four years, our high school has competed at the national level more often than at any other time in our school's history in events ranging from National History Day, to quiz bowl, to FBLA, and engine building.

Our class has helped to establish a national presence for Thomas County Central High School.

Finally, we are here to mark the beginning of the next stage of our lives, but what will greet us?

News reports inform us about the threats of violent extremists in our own country and abroad; riots disrupt major cities and create fears that areas of our nation are a tinderbox that could erupt any moment; accumulated governmental debt will have to be confronted by our generation.

These problems could make us anxious about the future.

We have had many good teachers here, but the Greatest Teacher taught us in John 14: 27, "Peace I leave with you . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

As we claim this promise of peace, we must put away our anxieties, and we must **with untroubled hearts** tackle the **big** problems of our age.

Parts of our world are scarred by senseless violence while children and adults hunger. Cruel diseases cause pain and death, and growing water shortages threaten our way of life.

There are wars that need ending, diseases that need curing, and environmental disasters looming on the horizon, but as I consider the class of 2015, I know that God has provided our generation with peacemakers, teachers, farmers, doctors, researchers, engineers, theologians, missionaries, and scientists who have the ability to conquer these challenges.

However, the realization of this "Brave New World" will not happen automatically just because we have the ability to make it so. It will require an important choice.

The world has taught us to seek individual success, and surely we all want to be successful. **But** we must reach past individual success to work even harder to be **significant**.

Joshua Becker writes, "Success is never enough. Financial success will never satisfy the inmost desires of our soul.

"Significance [on the other hand] always lasts. Significance will always outlast you.

"Significance satisfies our soul. While the thirst for success is never quenched, significance satisfies our deepest heart and soul."

The first task that the Creator gave to man is recorded in Genesis 2:15. ". . . The Lord God took the man and put him into the garden to till it and keep it."

Yes, it is true; the first profession ordained by God was farming. The text begs the question, "Are we 'keeping the garden'?"

Our generation must keep God's gift in mind as we answer several questions:

Will we use our knowledge to exploit the planet or to save it?

How do we educate a skeptical citizenry to the realities of climate change and leverage scientific know-how to save our planet?

Can we harness the power of the Internet and social media for good or will it destroy us by wasting away our time on senseless banality and hurtful and even obscene content?

You might say, "These problems are too big for us."

Let's remember the wisdom of Harper Lee's character Atticus Finch in *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

". . . real courage is . . . when you know you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway and see it through no matter what."

But my friends, we are NOT licked. Our generation has the power to choose to be significant.

In closing, I return to our Alma mater. "These gifts so rare thou dost ever impart."

Knowledge, truth, honor, and courage of heart **are** rare gifts; let's use them in our quest to achieve **significance**. The guiding hand of these truths will lead us.

Remember, today is about showing gratitude for those who have made this moment possible, celebrating what we have achieved, but most importantly, today is about going out to be **significant**.

So my fellow Yellow Jackets, when today's ceremony ends, **SWARM** out of this place to fulfill the unique calling the creator has given you, and **choose to be significant**.