

2009 Valedictorian Address

“Χαιρετισμούς!” kai re tis mous! Greetings! Tonight the Class of 2009, embarks on the next journey of our lives. As an entering freshman at Harding University, my adventure starts almost immediately when on June 8 I depart for a study abroad program in Greece. This upcoming trip has caused me to realize that life is a journey taking us from one destination to another. As we graduate today, we leave high school and set sail for the future. Yet just as my voyage to the seaside Porto Rafti will take preparation, so the journey called life necessitates certain requirements.

First of all, one must obtain their passport. As you may know, a passport is a document identifying an individual as a citizen of a specific country and attesting to his or her identity and ability to travel freely. As Christians, we have a special passport that grants us access to our final destination. We are children of God, and thus, we are citizens of Heaven. With this information stamped on our passports, the class of 2009 stands confidently, knowing the Creator of the universe is directing our steps. He is our travel guide. His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.” We are certain of our identity in Christ for Psalm 139 records, "Our frame was not hidden from Him when we were made in the secret place.

When we were woven together in the depths of the earth, His eyes saw our unformed bodies. All the days ordained for us were written in His book before one of them came to be." The Lord, the King of our final resting place knows the plans he has for us. They are "plans to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us hope and a future." With our passports in hand, we are free to travel wherever God leads us in life. Not stuck in one place, we have the liberty to experience any place, culture, or occupation. Our elite citizenship grants us access to fulfill all of our numerous goals and dreams.

But a passport is only the beginning step in preparing for a journey. One must know where they are heading and prepare for the sites they will visit. For my trip to the sunny Aegean, I am excited to say I recognized nearly every city on our itinerary. I have learned about Paul's travels to Athens, the Areopagus, Corinth, and Ephesus. I have read mythology discussing places like Delphi, Thebes, and the Temple of Diana. I am so prepared to see these places I have studied. For the journey of life, Coram Deo has taught us hard work, persevere, and courage. The lessons we learned will keep us alert and able to enjoy our next stopping place. The

Greek playwright Euripides even stated, "Experience; travel - these are an education in themselves."

Furthermore, one needs assistance and fellowship on a long and adventurous journey. Travel partners and travel guides! While in High School, our class has helped and encouraged each other; teachers and faculty have guided and mentored us, keeping our focus on the journey. As we depart from CDA, we will meet new traveling companions who will enjoy the sites with us. Yet, we are aided not only by those seen, but also by those unseen. Many have gone before us, pioneers of the Christian life. We look back to their examples and learn how to survive and thrive as Children of God on the journey. God has provided us with both past and present travelers with whom we can press on toward the heavenly goal. According to our predecessor St. Augustine, "The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page."

Once connected with fellow travelers, one should pack necessities for the voyage. Considering I will want to bring back souvenirs from the Mediterranean, I am planning to pack lightly. As Aleksander (Solz-Zshen-it-sen) Solzhenitsyn said, "Own only what you can carry with you; know language, know countries, know people. Let your memory be your travel

bag.” In other words, pack your soul lightly. Like Christian from Pilgrim’s Progress, don’t let worries and anxieties about your future bog you down. Our great travel guide tells us, “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap, nor store away in barns, yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they?” God is directing our future, so no need to doubt His leading. Travel lightly! Take pleasant memories of the past, friends, and the wonderful places you’ve been. Give your problems to God and focus instead on the next exciting destination He has planned for you.

As you travel, have a sense of adventure! We may love our location now, but if we stay, we will miss seeing all the other awesome places God has created. When traveling, James Mich-ner said, "If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion, and avoid the people, you might better stay at home." So go exploring! I can not wait to taste fresh gyros (JEER-ohs) and authentic baklava, shop at the ancient Plaka, climb the steps of Meteora, a 14th century monastery, and meet the locals at Ly-KA-vitos Greek Orthodox Church.

While we often cannot wait to arrive at the destination, the actual travel offers opportunity. This summer I am flying with 26 other Harding

Freshmen from nine different states for 13 hours across the Atlantic. As I already know a few of my companions, the flight will be a time to meet and bond with the rest before we enter a whirlwind tour. In life, our ultimate destination is, according to Hebrews 11:10, “a city whose builder and maker is God.” But the Lord put us here on earth for a reason. Jesus told His followers “Go into all the world and preach the gospel.” Not only is He sending us on journeys, but He wants us to make an impact at each crossroad. We are each going different paths. Some of us may become business professionals, graphic designers and movie producers, psychologists, physical therapists, and some of us have yet to define our calling. But we all have the same mission while on the journey and that is to leave a sweet fragrance for Christ with those we meet. Our focus is not just on Heaven, but also on the the intermediate destinations we impact.

Finally travelers, as a last reminder, don't forget home. Though we mature and experience new societies, stay in touch! Send a postcard of where you are in life. Seniors, teachers, faculty, family, and friends, let us take up our packs, join hands with our travel companions, and say bon voyage for an exciting adventure through life! With that I'd like to say “kale

nux ta / kai / ah thay aas / A-ulogeea” or in other words, "Good night and
God bless!"