

Hello everyone! Let's start off with some Bible. The Christians say that for some, it is more difficult to enter through the gates of heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle – such it seems for a 9<sup>th</sup> grader to go all the way from the first day of school and graduate from the class of 2017. We must admit that, at times, this class was a mostly quiet battlefield marked by attrition where the warrior's greatest and, at times, only attribute was obstinacy. One needed to be not only strong but maybe a little bit lucky, too, to weather the storm of the last four years. So I'd like to make a special call out to the survivors: Irene O'Connor, Sebastian Cervantes, Sarah Corbin, and Daniel Kouba. You made it, and you've done a great job making these other bandwagoners feel welcome, too. Just kidding. I'd also like to recognize those who have walked this path with us for a time but have arrived at different destinations. We remember the words of Longfellow that They who go feel not the pain of parting, it is they who stay behind that suffer. Sierra Trupiano, Sylvie Tyska, Lucas Kurz, Johanna Schmidt, Remy Thelier, Max Goldberg, Jeshua Breitbach, Maggie Petrozzini, Eli Perry, Sequoyah Dockry, ...The day is a little less happy that you are not up here with us but we must also remember the words of Charles Dickens that the pain of parting is nothing to the joy of meeting again and it is a blessing to see some your faces in the crowd today. Everyone who has made it to the finish line, and those who haven't, represent, probably, our most diverse group of graduates since the inception, 20 years ago, of the

Youth Initiative High School. Depending on how you count them, this class is comprised of no less than 8, a majority, of boarding students of one stripe or another. That means a lot of things, but above all, it is an amazing testament to the hospitality, determination, and singularity of this community. So many people and so many families have given of their time and talents to open this little corner of the world to students as far afield as Russia, Korea, Mexico, and Morocco. But I'd like to take a moment to thank one of them in particular, our Boarding Coordinator (and my lovely wife), Bean Voz. It may not have always looked pretty from the outside, but, hey, what does around here? Bean, and many others, guided and sometimes dragged these students through the violent fluctuations of adolescence, surrogate family life, and the adjustment to a new academic and local culture in the spirit of our school; with love, communication, and perspective. And she managed to keep the whole thing in a neatly alphabetized collection of spreadsheets and hanging file folders as proof to those that were uncomfortable with chaos (herself included) that everything remained under control. As a side note, you have Bean to thank as well for another year of poring over my speech to ensure I don't offend somebody's grandma. Seriously, note to the Board of Trustees, if Bean ever decides to resign her post you should probably just pre-emptively fire me before something happens that can't be undone.

Anyway, enough about my marital dynamic. What about this group of young, quasi-adults seated before us, poised to burst forth into the world like so many pebbles from a slingshot? As individuals each of them brings some unique combination of talent, whether it be technical, athletic, musical, social, academic, artistic, or simply sporting a sweet pair of painstakingly sculpted biceps – this is a class full of warm, dynamic individuals with a whole lot of potential. But as a class, it hasn't always been daisies and dark chocolate. This has been a class touched by death, divorce, mental and physical illness – sometimes volatile, other times quietly doleful, rarely at peace. I, and many members of the faculty, have spent many a reflective moment or animated conversation, trying to reconcile this apparent dissonance between a group that can't seem to get its collective footing and a collection of discrete individuals who are bright, talented, and generally a joy to be around. There is a pain here which not everyone can see, a subluxation that silently distorts the collective plexus.

So when I really think deeply about this class I am reminded of the primacy of the Wound in the human condition.

Animals first and angels second, privileged both by historical and contemporary standards, our instinct to shy away from the Wound is reinforced by our utilitarian, bourgeois culture. Everywhere the Wound is denigrated; avoided at all costs and

eradicated at any price, the wounded are to be rescued, and if, by some stroke of bad luck, this is unsuccessful or impossible the wounded are to be cloistered, their wounds concealed, medicated, ignored, or steadfastly denied. This is a modern axiom. And, if we are to be completely honest with ourselves, this impulse to turn away from our human destiny of woundedness plays no small part in the foundation of our school, and in the decisions that led to these students before us being enrolled at YIHS. After all, it is safe here in our little village, and though we cannot fully escape discomfort, we might at least ensure that our wounds may only be of the ephemeral kind.

But in running from these wounds, as a society, as a school, and as individuals, we run from that very thing which bestows our identity as human beings, above the animals which grovel in the dirt and closer to those cherubim whose existence is made of poetry and Reason. For there are two kinds of wounds, and this is the first: We, each and every one of us, is extracted from the body of a woman by cut or by bruise, and from that very moment we are, on a very fundamental level, an individual; not merely mathematically as 3 is not equal to 4, nor 4 to 5. For unlike the infinite array of discrete whole numbers, objects, and creatures in this universe, our individuality, our loneliness, is at all times wakefully evident to us. How can we get back to the center? By religion I am told that Jesus wounds will make mine go away. By science I am told that there are as many water molecules in a glass of water as there are glasses of water on earth and

that, therefore, in a twist of perverted deGrassian mysticism, I have drunk the urine of Abraham Lincoln and King Nebuchadnezzar. But as a balm to our existential sequestration, these only treat the symptoms, for still I am left to contemplate these universal truths alone. We are born alone, ripped from the primeval darkness of the mother's womb. This is the first Wound, the one that cannot be avoided.

There is also a second type of wound, one perhaps a little less Jungian. It's all the stuff that happens along the way. And, as we run our fingers over the scar left by that first, most terrible wound of ego, we do whatever is in our power to protect ourselves and those we love from pain and hardship. And, with enough good breeding, money, education, and some strategically employed psychotherapy and self-help seminars we can do a pretty effective job at eluding life's physical and emotional henchman, we can lay before us a sort of railroad track of privilege over the rough terrain of life. But some of us can't. We have parents who divorce, or die; bodies or minds that break, we are born into poverty or violence or neglect. We are, through no fault of our own, re-wounded. This is the second Wound, the one from which we flee.

Today it is my hope to challenge the paradigmatic narrative that ranks the life of the privileged above the life of the wounded. Today it is my hope that you as individuals, and that we as a community can reclaim the second Wound, not as something which

disfigures or cripples us, not as something to be hidden to fester like a mushroom, but, quite the contrary, as the source of all human beauty, power, and achievement. What drives us to transcendent achievement: is it not this Wound which has lifted the Egyptian pyramids from the sand, and painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? What leads us to take the thrilling risk of compassion: is it not this Wound that gives water to the dying soldier and bread to the starving child? Is it privilege and comfort that break our hearts open to love?: no, it is the Wound that cherishes the laughter of children or seeks out the skin of a lover.

Imagine for a moment the greatest jigsaw puzzle you can conjure up, one with more than 7 billion pieces, one which only God (or possibly Jacob) would consider laying out on the table on a rainy afternoon. Now imagine for a moment that all the pieces of this puzzle have perfectly smooth edges and perfectly straight sides. That puzzle sucks, right. Even Jacob couldn't put that puzzle together and even if he managed to, the next time Shawn cruised by and fell off his unicycle Jacob's work would scatter into a royal, discombobulated mess. That's why they don't make puzzles like that. We are each the pieces of a great jigsaw puzzle and our bulbous protrusions and our unsightly craters, in short, our wounds, are what draw us to one another and lock us together into an image of beauty, greater than ourselves.

So if ever you are afraid that you are too broken to create anything meaningful or that you are too wounded to be loved, or that you are too wasted to keep moving forward, remember these: that creation is nothing grander than the act of picking up the pieces, that only a wounded person can be truly loved and truly love, and that it is the province of the fruit to be devoured so that the seed might flourish. You will create and love and flourish not in spite of your wounds, but because of them.

Yes, this second wound hurts, it is true, as the sun burns our eyes or as great beauty breaks our heart into tears. The second wound, the anguish of abandonment, the tender bruise of failure, the sharp crack of violence, by driving us back within such close psychic proximity to the overwhelming power and disruption of the first wound, is certainly capable of destroying us like a satellite re-entering the atmosphere on its return to Earth. This is why the artist becomes a drug addict, the inventor retreats to his hermitage, and the criminal acts without shame, so driven to madness can one be by the second Wound.

But how can we deny, as well, that this second wound is our only portal to the chamber of the Godhead. That if we are humble enough to honor this wound and brave enough to command it we can clear a path for ourselves to wonder and beauty, the nobility of truth, and purpose in living. Through this second wound we might not only heal the

cosmic fracture of our own birth, but be driven to heal the wounds of our brothers and sisters as well.

My dear graduates, some of you have already been twice wounded and you have already begun the work of transfiguration. It is heavy work, long and arduous and complex. But I have seen in you that you possess the strength to be not overcome by your fortune, but to draw from it sweet water from a bitter well. Surely you will never be completely lost, for the Koran reminds us that God does not burden a soul beyond what it can bear. And when you have mastered yourself and come to love your scabs and scars you will truly be poised for greatness.

Others of you have so far have escaped with only some abrasions and minor bruising. Do not consider yourselves lucky but instead unfinished, for there is great mediocrity in comfort. The four-lane interstate you travel now might get you somewhere safely and quickly, but if your destination is purpose, and understanding, and greatness, there is no substitute for getting a tow to a lonely service station on a Podunk country road or being carjacked at a stoplight in a rough part of town. So do all that you can to prepare yourselves for the second wound's arrival. Seek out new challenges and cultivate your relationships, you will need their strength and solace when the blow arrives.

Well, we're almost to the end, now, and some of you might be thinking: wow, this speech is dark, this guy needs a vacation. Well, you're probably right about that second part. But this speech is not dark, it is a message of hope. It is a vote of confidence in a group of young people that I and we love and trust to go out into the world and make us proud. No, it hasn't always been a walk in the park, but what is a park but yet another desperate human attempt to mitigate the dangers of the urban street and the wild jungle. No one ever became an angel in a park. And so no longer can we be satisfied with this contrived, sanitized beauty. I choose to stand instead with the beauty of these graduates, imperfect, dangerous, unpredictable, true. This is a beautiful group of young people and I am proud to have been a part of their journey. May they go forth now secure in the knowledge of our love and respect, emboldened by what we have shared with them these last years, and above all poised to travel a path of resilience, creativity, and compassion.