

Thursday, April 9, 2020

To the graduating class of 2020:

Take a breath—you have endured much. Throughout your time at Taylor University, it is difficult to imagine the exhaustion you have felt as you march through the battlefield that is your own identity development. It is easy to understand how specific events in our country's history change the way we view politics, war, faith, and education; however, you have witnessed the polarization that comes from navigating a tough Presidential election, the confusion from the publication *Excalibur*, a completed suicide by a student and member of the community, and a head-scratching decision to invite the Vice President to speak at Commencement. After enduring three tough years of navigating your place in all of this, I expect you entered this year with a sense of, "let's just finish strong." Unfortunately, you are now feeling robbed of the opportunity to finish—period.

A global pandemic has hit our homes, families, communities, country, and world. We are reminded of this in our daily routines—or lack of them. In your time at an institution that values, above most, the importance of person-to-person, intentional community, the very identity Taylor University has helped you shape within yourselves is left unsatisfied as your undergraduate career comes to a close. There is no denying you are face-to-face with grief and yearning for completion. However, I write to you standing on the promise that we serve a God who goes before us and will never leave nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:8). In this time of questioning and confusion, I assume many of you also face a level of guilt in the midst of that questioning. I write to you now, in the midst of that questioning, to say *thank you* with utmost sincerity.

During these times of Hail Mary prayers and questions, we believe our faith is at risk. I would like to combat that feeling by saying those Hail Mary, toss up prayers are the greatest acts

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of Christian faith to be found here on earth. In the midst of desperation, our foundation is revealed. There is an underlying spiritual yearning that occurs within us in times when nothing we do moves our current situation forward. In times of trial and heartbreak, our faith is most active. So, as you look up and ask questions like, “when will this end?” or “why is this happening?”, I stand before you confidently and answer with “I don’t know” in the most sincere and genuine posture possible. Because sometimes, there just isn’t an answer, and we need to admit that to ourselves and each other.

Those who ask the most questions are the ones who are closest to God’s favor. It is in the midst of turmoil that we take ourselves down from our own thrones and look up to God on His. The hardships you have endured these past four years are not fair. It is not fair that your senior year has been stolen from you and the future is so blurry. However, I would like to argue that you are not done yet. This is still a part of your Taylor experience and this will help shape you and your identity as you enter into the next chapter in your life. I am thankful that because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, our time on earth is the only hell we ever have to endure. I am thankful that in the midst of chaos I can mourn with those who mourn and weep with those who weep. I am thankful that Christ *knows* this pain and is present, even in the midst of isolation. God has not forsaken nor abandoned us; instead, He is more present than ever before. My heart is heavy as I weep with you during this time of disarray; yet, it is full of joy as I reflect on how proud I am of you for having the courage to question and seek the face of our loving God. Although you may feel isolated, you are not alone. Though you may feel angry, you are loved. Though you may feel forgotten, you are cherished.

In Christ,

Ryan W. Kristofek