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Children of the Light



by Charles Veenstra

Graduates, family, friends, faculty, and staff of Dordt College: I consider it an honor to speak to our graduates for a few minutes—in a sense to give the last word to them as they leave us. Graduates, I am happy to be part of your exciting day, and I congratulate you.

When you graduates first came to Dordt College as students, you were required to take a course called “Kingdom, Identity, and Calling,” known at that time as Gen. 100. Some of you were

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in my class, and it gives me great joy to see you here today. In that course, you were asked to study Dr. Hielema’s book, *Deepening the Colors*. Although you might not all have agreed at the time, this is a very good book. The book begins with the story of God’s Kingdom and moves from there to consider who we *are*—as image-bearers—within that kingdom, that is, who we are called to *be*. As you worked through the course and the book, you were invited “to examine the colors of your own life as the light of Jesus shines on them, and to seek the deepening of these colors through following where Jesus leads.” We looked at the needs of the world, we asked you to discover your talents and passions, we examined truth-walking habits, we tried to write our story within God’s story, and finally we asked what we were supposed to *do*. Dr. Hielema asked us to think of ourselves as the faint beginnings of our New Jerusalem colors. Today I want you to think again for a few minutes about those colors. What colors will the world see when they look at you? What gem will you be—A ruby? An emerald? An onyx? Or will you only be a stone that reflects no color?

Throughout your years at Dordt College, your professors sought to help you become the person you are called by God to be. Always they went back to the theme of considering how your talents would intersect with the needs of the world. That point, as you know, is where God is now calling you to work. To shine the light of Jesus to those in need surely would deepen the colors of what people will see in your life. In order to most clearly shine the light of Jesus, you must be a *diamond*.

A few of you have heard me speak of diamonds, and I want to do so again today—for all of you. A diamond is one of the most precious gems. We use diamonds for some of our most challenging tasks, like using diamond-coated tools to perform some of the most difficult cutting. In our culture they symbolize the highest and most intense relationships—engagement and marriage. When a young woman gets engaged, she loves to show off her diamond ring! Remember, too, that God’s covenant is his marriage to his people, but instead of a ring on the finger, he makes *you* the diamond.

Just as a diamond expert cuts the gem into a particular shape and polishes it, so God shapes and polishes us through many life experiences, some of which seem to be very cutting. He is working to form us as sparkling gems for his crown. The pressures of life are used by God to increase the brilliance and clarity of who we are. Diamonds, we are told, are forever. So, too, human beings are created with eternity in their hearts.

When we go to a jeweler to shop for diamonds, we see many different shapes and sizes. If they were all the same, shopping for a diamond would be far less exciting. All are beautiful. So it is, or should be, with people. When we see all the different shapes, sizes, and faces, our response should be that they are all beautiful. How many facets does a diamond have? Usually more than we count. The more we study a diamond, the more we realize its many sides. Likewise with people, the more we get to know them, the more we realize the many facets to their lives. How often we say, “I didn’t know he could do that.” The more we study people, the more interesting they become.

Notice that a diamond has no color of its own. It gets its brilliance and its color from the light, most dramatically from the sunlight. On cloudy days, assuming for a moment we do not have artificial lights, a diamond can hardly sparkle. Since we are created in the image of God and called to image Him in our daily walk, we should be like diamonds in God’s world. He is the light, and we are called to refract his light and spread color to all of our neighbors. *But one cannot show the beautiful colors of God if one is not in touch with the Light.* If we let the light of God shine through us, we can imagine the beauty that will be displayed all around us. We can

also imagine that the beautiful colors we display will be much larger than what we are. People turn to view the color rather than the diamond, and so should it be. If we are true diamonds for God, we will be instruments for displaying his rainbows throughout the world, and people will bring the praise to Him. Even a very tiny diamond can demonstrate the beauty of God.

Diamonds have great value: they are perhaps the most precious of gems. If we were to lose a diamond, we would be broken-hearted. How much more we break the heart of God when we slip away from him! *This is the challenge of your life: to stay with God.* Consider how much he paid for us! Surely he regards each of us with more value than a diamond. In the same way, we also should value one another. By his grace we can become, as the Apostle Peter says, living stones (I Peter 2:4). Peter says, “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

As you consider your calling in life this day, I want to ask you to think of yourself as a beautiful diamond created by God to be used for his glory. As a nurse on the night shift, you can be a light in the night. As a mother, you can bring the sunshine of God’s word to the children. As a farmer, you can plant a field that becomes a rainbow of color for God. As a teacher, you can take God’s word and turn it into insights for the students. As a business manager, you can reflect the soft light of care for your employees. The face of a social worker should shine because she or he belongs to Jesus. The counselor brings color into the dark lives of those who hurt. You may fill in the blanks with your own profession by asking yourself this: “How can I be a diamond for Jesus this day by reflecting his light in this world?”

But staying in touch with the light of Jesus is no easy task. The empires of this world do all they can to be attractive while at the same time throwing dirt over the diamonds for Jesus. Pastor Mark Verbruggen, from First Christian Reformed Church here in Sioux Center, often warns us about selling out to the *empires* of our age. Beware of the

empires who seek your allegiance. You cannot trust institutions: they are far too fragile to hold you. Look how quickly institutions of Wall Street fall. Large corporations go bankrupt. Businesses fail. The government promises solutions it cannot and does not deliver. Too many colleges have slipped away from their Christian mission. Even the instituted church too often caters to worldly formulas rather than the Word of God. Can one always go back to the family for security? No, it, too, is faulted and often fails.

More than institutions, other empires seek your allegiance. Consider materialism and consumerism: they look attractive. But they are a *cancer* that is never satisfied and continues to demand more flesh to devour. Materialism will not be satisfied until it has taken over your life. It will do all it can to cover your diamond status so that the light of Jesus is not seen.

Consider entertainment as an empire that would draw you away from your calling. Many temples to the gods of sports are being built: race tracks with stands for a hundred thousand and more, football stadiums that are packed on weekends, computer games that suck hundreds of hours away from constructive work, second homes on the lake that draw many away from church on Sunday. And then there are all the toys which take huge amounts of money that is needed elsewhere. These are all empires of this world that can draw you away from your mission. Can you withstand these? When you begin to serve these empires, the light of Jesus grows dim.

Now, I suppose you might be saying with holy resolve, “No, I will never give in to those empires.” But refusal is not that easy. These empires are like magnets. Almost before you know it, you can be pulled away from your mission.

The only way you can stay true to your mission of serving as an image bearer in the kingdom is by staying in touch with the light, which is Jesus Christ. Let Him polish you and make you shine. Then you can face those empires with a prophetic voice—calling all institutions to bow before our Father. The kingdom requires your voice. In the words of Dr. Gordon Spykman from this very

spot a generation ago: “Nothing matters but the kingdom of God, but because of the kingdom, everything—literally everything—matters.” Go where He calls. Bring His light to all corners of the Kingdom.

Remember those truth-walking habits we talked about in Gen. 100? We talked about daily devotions, about eating together as family, about remaining part of the Christian community, about staying in tune with the needs of the world, and the list went on. Those truth-walking habits are aimed at keeping us in close touch with God. The lessons we learned about being children of the light were good lessons, even though we didn’t always do our homework. As you now begin a new, significant chapter in your life, consider once again those truth-walking habits: eating together, daily reading the Bible, praying without ceasing, caring for others around you, and enjoying with thanks the life God is giving you. These habits may not be easy, but they are worth the effort. These habits will help keep you in touch with the Light of Jesus.

There is nothing that gives a professor greater joy than to have a graduate come back to tell the story of how he or she is faithfully working in God’s kingdom—caring for new children, being busy in the church, honestly working at a profession, and remaining faithful in marriage. This faithfulness is the deepest desire of our hearts.

And now, here is the good part: God’s covenant with us is a marriage, and He does not divorce his people. He will give you all that you need to bring His light to the world. Remember that He also calls *us* to be faithful. *He gives all and He asks all.*

By his grace, you, graduates, now leave here with a mind that is well-trained for service. As the colors of your life deepened through your education at Dordt College, you are now equipped to bring the glory of God to this world. *Let those colors continue to deepen.* Go with His blessing. In the words of the Lutheran Vespers benediction, I ask that God go before you to show you the way, that He go above you to watch over you, that He walk beside you to encourage you, that He go behind you to give you strength, and that He be within you to give you peace. Walk as children of the Light!