

Student Lasallian Commencement Address

May 2019

Presented by: Garrett McMahon

Good morning members of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Livingston, honored guests, faculty, graduates, families, and friends it is so exciting to be standing here today speaking with you all because this is the end of merely the beginning for all of us.

I would like to begin by keeping a small promise I have made to my Army unit commander, who was nice enough to allow me to be here rather than sleeping in the mud with them this past weekend in rural Indiana. Sounds wonderful right? He has afforded me this opportunity on the condition that I convey his apologies for not being present for such a wonderful occasion and that he is sad he and the other officers couldn't aid me in this speech presentation as a beautifully breathtaking background of interpretative dancers, combat uniform and all.

Well he may not have said that last part, but it's not often I can get a job in on my commanding officer. So, I've opted to get it in here while I can.

All jokes aside, I want to highlight just one of the many important things I have learned through almost 30 years now of life experience in and out of uniform, whether it was hospital scrubs or combat fatigues.

That lesson is to always serve selflessly and seek out opportunities to do so regularly in our daily lives. This requires some sacrifice on our parts. No, not like the movie Saving Private Ryan type

of sacrifice. More like the willingness to give our time and emotional support to those who need it most kind of sacrifice.

I am a 29-year-old who was at one point in my life an All-American Parachute Infantryman who used to think emotionally exposing myself was a sign of weakness, boy was that wrong on so many levels. Through my time here Lewis's Lasallian values of respect for others, and the spirit of inclusion have fortified my Christian love for my fellow man, granting me the true strength and courage it takes to choose to be emotionally vulnerable and crawl down into another human being's darkness. As a student nurse here at Lewis University, I was afforded the life changing opportunity to care of a fellow veteran who truly felt alone and abandoned. In this moment I share with you, I held tightly onto this man's brittle and shaky hand, as we both were locked eye-to-eye, sharing tears together amid his painful, yet unavoidable bandage change to a wound so deep, you could almost fit a softball inside. It wasn't just offering my hand to help ease this gentleman's pain that shook me to my core, it was staring back at him, eyes locked, that I was able to truly see that he knew I was there for him.

That's all there was to it. This once clean-cut hero, now homeless, broken, and afraid was experiencing something unimaginable, but he knew I was there for him. He needed that moment, and simply to be seen. With the new strength I had been given, I was able to give him that, I showed him that I saw him, and that he was, and will always be my brother.

You might be thinking, "Hey Garrett, what's the point man? I'm an accounting major; This nursing stuff means nothing to me, so where can I possibly make an impact like this". Well my friends you may not know it just yet, but Lewis has strengthened your mind too, and instilled

these Lasallian values within you as well. So, I challenge you to try this on for size. Go out, and buy a homeless person a meal, not just pay for it, but sit down and eat and talk with them. Make them feel like your family for a while. Or go volunteer at a shelter and let someone know, “I see you”. Or maybe even something more in line with your specialty, such as offering your specialized financial services free of charge to a struggling single parent by helping them file a tax return or simply apply for a loan they desperately need. After doing this, I invite you to contact me, and tell me all about how refreshed you feel, I guarantee you will.

I would like to close with a quote that I’d uncovered in the process of creating this speech for you all today. It reads:

“The true gift God has given us is the ability to share our blessings, and we are only truly able to reach the greatest level of happiness when we give our gifts away.”

Class of 2019 always remember to share your gifts and forever look for opportunities to crawl down into someone else’s darkness and let them know “I see you”. Thank you all for an unforgettable time here at Lewis University. Now it’s our time to go out and inspire hope.

Congratulations guys, we did it!