

Order of Service "Final Exams at Hogwarts: A Commencement Address"

Sunday, June 6, 2010

10:00 AM

Welcome: Board Host

Prelude

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words: from Albus Dumbledore

Opening Song: "The Hogwarts School Song"

Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy warty Hogwarts,
Teach us something please,
Whether we be old and bald
Or young with scabby knees,
Our heads could do with filling
With some interesting stuff,
For now they're bare and full of air,
Dead flies and bits of fluff,
So teach us things worth knowing,
Bring back what we've forgot,
Just do your best, we'll do the rest,
And learn until our brains all rot.
(pick your own tune)

Time for All Ages: "What is Magic?"

Sing Children to their party: "As You Go"

By Kathleen Tracy

Announcements: Board Host

Reading: from Harry Potter and the Deathly Harrows

J. K. Rowling

Celebrating with Music

Commencement Address from Hogwarts

Sung Response: #131 "Love Will Guide Us"

Spoken Response

Candles of Joy and Sorrow/Offering

Prayer and Meditation

Closing Song: #414 "As We Leave This Friendly Place"

Closing Words: from Albus Dumbledore

Closing Song: #414 (repeat)

Celebrants: Lorene Hales & the Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods

Pianist: Susan Christie



Opening Words: "Welcome, Welcome to (your commencement from Hogwarts. Before we begin our celebration), I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak! Thank you!" (Adapted from *The Philosopher's Stone*, p. 123)

Reading: from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Harrows*

J. K. Rowling (p, 741+)

[Voldemort, the villain and Harry Potter are dueling verbally before the magical battle that ends the book)

V- "Dumbledore's last plan went wrong, Harry Potter!"

"Yeah, it did," said Harry. You're right. But before you try to kill me, I'd advise you to think about what you've done . . . Think, and try for some remorse. Riddle. . . ."

V - "What is this?"

Of all things that Harry had said to him, beyond any revelation or taunt, nothing had shocked Voldemort like this. Harry saw his pupils contract to thin slits, saw the skin around his eyes whiten.

"It's your last chance," said Harry, "it's all you've got left. . . . I've seen what you'll be otherwise. . . . Be a man. . . try . . . Try for some remorse. . . ."

Commencement Address from Hogwarts:

Please do not think of me as Professor Dumbledore or McGonagall or even Snape or Voldemort. I am a simple bard, a teller of tales, who has been asked to say a few more words than Dumbledore did at the opening of this event. Reasons for this are unimportant and mostly have to do with my interest in Hogwarts and willingness to add my two cents to an already burgeoning fortune of material trying to bring together the major points of the education offered through Hogwarts School of Wizardry.

Here we are at the end of an academic year, looking back at our past, with or without final exams. For one thing, the real exams are not the tests we take, formal or informal, planned or pop, but the way in which we are able to use what we have learned within our lives. Has the learning been hefted by our hands and become part of our life skills so we can meet the challenges that stand before us? Only living it will tell us. But living the lessons truly and consciously will deepen and expand our skills and help us to model them for others who may come after us to this calling to use magic for the good of all life.

What, you may ask, is magic? Arthur C. Clarke has called it "technology unexplained." Those who call themselves "witches" or "wizards" might say, "It is the trained ability to use the power of will and word to change our world for the better." We, Unitarian Universalists, might say, "It is the awareness that our choices and acts matter, so we had best consider our intentions and possible consequences."

Let me begin with the reading when Harry faced Voldemort in the final battle of Tom Riddle's life. We must understand that the capacity for remorse, for feeling guilt over the mistakes and bad choices we have made allows us to find some redemption. It makes it possible to move away from evil and toward good, for remorse reflects a capacity to love. Albus Dumbledore practiced this lesson when he chose not to accept power when he was offered leadership in the Ministry of Magic repeatedly. But I am getting ahead of myself. . .

Let us consider the lesson of Voldemort's struggles with life: One can not gain the world by tearing one's self apart into little bits in the quest for power and immortality. All that does is force one to deny one's true power in a mindless search for something that is inhuman and inhumane. While one may appear to have gained power, it is power that will always be overcome by love.

While magic can be done alone - and often is (especially by Harry Potter, sometimes to his detriment), and every person needs time alone to determine one's true gifts and calling, every person also needs community: i.e., other people who bring different skills and gifts to the whole enterprise to round out the possibilities for a better outcome. We need the teachers who have our best interests at heart, like Professor McGonagall or Dumbledore. We need teachers who see our weaknesses and challenge us to become strong in relation to them, like Severus Snape. We also need good friends, like Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley, companions in the learning. In addition, we need adults who support and mentor us, like Sirius Black. And, of course, we need to recognize the possibilities in those who seem inept. It was Neville Longbottom, an unlikely hero, who ultimately killed Voldemort's power snake, Nagini, with the sword of Gryffindor in the final battle.

Speaking of teachers, remember that each teacher brings out different gifts in the students. Even a ditz like Professor Trelawney offers lessons one can only learn later in life when the occasion to use them arises and their meaning becomes clear. My professor of French horn, Dr. James M. Thurmond, told me shortly before my graduation from college that I should listen to all my future instructors, using what seems fitting and casting that which does not fit away. I have found that I do not always know what it is that fits - and what does not. Years after an actual lesson, I sometimes find the meaning that did not emerge at first offering.

Which reminds me of a lesson from another of my teachers, Shirley Schlorff, offered me: "No one is as good, or as bad, as we think they are." This certainly proved true over and over again in Harry Potter's - and my-education. Albus Dumbledore had deep weaknesses that kept him from attaining the level of power he might have had he been free of lust for power. And Severus Snape's love for Lily Potter overcame his distaste for Harry because he was James Potter's son.

These illustrations may cause us to recognize that one cannot always assume who is one's friend and who is not. I have learned, through hard experience, not to burn bridges in relationships, because some of the people who have hurt me most and whom I have hurt, have also offered learning that I have needed desperately in my life. Again, I think of Snape.

In addition, we learn that obsession with class and breeding is useless when one is working for peace and light in the world. Draco Malfoy learned that the hard way when his obsession with "mudbloods" and his sense of entitlement through being from an old wizarding family took him into life-threatening evil. He did not learn this lesson easily or well.

Harry Potter's strongest characteristic was courage, but he was also head-strong and very needy: needy to prove himself and needy to find home within himself. He finally learned - to some degree - that his courage and good mind needed to be tempered by skill and discipline. Those were lessons he had to learn over and over again. Even though he had to spend time in the wilderness alone (hearkening to Jesus' time in the desert), Harry ultimately learned that he had to pay attention to the inner promptings that did not agree with his ego. He had to accept the knowing that did not make him look good or give him adulation and follow his inner understanding to honor what is right in the larger context of "the greater good for all."

Of course, Dumbledore had learned through bitter loss of his family that his lust for power made for being a bad leader. As he said:

. . . I had proven, as a very young man, that power was my weakness and my temptation. It is a curious thing, Harry, but perhaps those who are best suited to power are those who never sought it. Those who, like you, have leadership thrust upon them, and take up the mantle because they must, and find to their own surprise that they wear it well. (*Deathly Hallows*, P. 718.)

Thus, we are reminded of a difficult lesson: that power may look good on us in our minds, but often leads us to places we find very difficult, painful, and destructive. It is a sword that can cut two ways.

Dumbledore offers another difficult lesson: that there are worse things in life than death. He pointed out that "the true master does not seek to run away from Death. He accepts that he must die, and understands that there are far, far worse things in the living world than dying." (*Deathly Hallows*, pp. 720-721.) When we come to a place where fear of death does not drive our decisions, we are better able to see life for what it truly is and to live it to the full. James W. Fowler III tells us the final stage of religious learning is "to love life and to hold it loosely."

Harry also learned that death is not the end: that we live on in the memories and connections we have made in our lives. Certainly Sirius Black and Dumbledore spoke to Harry after their deaths when needed most. Dumbledore explained it thus:

You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us? You think we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble. Your mother is alive in you, and shows herself most plainly when you have need of her. (from *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. J.K. Rowling, pp. 427-428.)

Whether these experiences are formed by inner promptings of memory or an actual presence with us is uncertain and, really, unimportant. They often serve us well. Thus, we are reminded to pay attention to our inner voice and all that life has to show us. We need to put our minds to the awareness of that voice and sharpen that awareness. This is called spiritual practice.

Of course, the greatest message from Hogwarts is the lesson that Dumbledore repeated often and our Universalist heritage asserts as well: that love is stronger than death and that love will protect and strengthen us in our hour of deepest need. It may not be love in the moment, but once we have been baptized in love and accept it as a power in our lives, however that happens, we truly have magic and power to create a greater good for all and to overcome evil in its worst form.

As Dumbledore asserts in the first book:

Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort (or evil) cannot understand it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's love for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign . . . to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. (*The Philosopher's Stone*, p. 299)

Please, do not despair should you feel that you have never had such love given to you. I have learned that *giving* such love is even more powerful than receiving it. I believe that love comes from deep within, from our deepest Source of Life, and we can access it even if we have not been given it by another person. There is a Larger Love from which any and all of us may drink, a Fountain of Life, a Source, available to those who seek and humbly receive this blessing. That is the promise of Universalism, of our heritage and our Unitarian Universalist faith. So I wish you love with respect, responsibility, and relish! So Be It! Blessed Be!

Closing Words: from Albus Dumbledore

"Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and, above all, those who live without love. By returning, you may ensure that fewer souls are maimed, fewer families are torn apart. If that seems to you a worthy goal, then we say good-bye for the present." (*Deathly Hallows* p. 722)

And:

"After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure." (*The Philosopher's Stone*, p. 297)

