

Good morning, everyone—Trinitas board and faculty members, family and friends, students, and most notably, nationally honored students, returning and new.

I hope you'll forgive my being too blunt, but that's what I'm going to be, at least to begin.

Let's be honest. The most basic requirement for your being here this morning is that the numbers on your report card indicate that you possess some measure of intelligence. You're smart. Good for you! What does that mean beyond a number on a report card, though?

I don't know if the myth is still passed the way it was when I was young, but in those days, back when report cards were an actual card, back before the grannies took over Facebook, before all the kids had iPhones, back when Millennials were still nursing at their mother's breast, I'm talking a long time ago, the days when people were just now hearing about ATMs and debit cards, and back when cell phones came in bags that plugged into cigarette lighters with antennas strung up to the roof of your car—yeah!—back in those days, in those days the myth went like this: If you were smart, you would grow up to have plenty of money. That was it. It was a really simple myth—no babies on hillsides, no adulterous gods playing tricks on one another, no half-immortal men, none of the exciting stuff of myths. Just: If you were smart, you would grow up to have plenty of money. Is the myth still around?

The myth never actually said this, but it suggested that money was the point of being smart. If you were smart, you were guaranteed some of life's amenities that everyone wants but that not everyone is smart enough to have—maybe a house on a golf course, maybe a Volvo wagon—those are nice—maybe a beach condo or lake house, annual passes to Disney World, going out to eat a lot, stuff like that. That's the future life of smart kids, according to the myth.

But I think that myth was somehow deceptive. At least from where I stand now, it doesn't seem that intelligence and the easy life have that sort of one-to-one correspondence. In fact, the myth, in its simplicity, leaves out a really important part of the story. I think it is closer to the truth to say something like, If you are smart, and you want to use your smarts to get plenty of money, then you can grow up to have plenty of money.

I'll say it again, my modification of the myth: If you are smart, and you want to use your smarts to get plenty of money, then you can grow up to have plenty of money.

But what if we change the second phrase. Instead of “and you want to use your smarts to get plenty of money,” let’s insert, “and you want to use your smarts to free wrongfully convicted death-row inmates.”

Plug that into the formula and we get this: “If you are smart, and you want to use your smarts to free wrongfully-convicted death-row inmates, then you can grow up to.... (that’s right!) free wrongfully-convicted death-row inmates.”

Let’s try another one. For the middle phrase, let’s insert, “and you want to use your smarts to make your hometown of Pensacola, FL, a bicycle-friendly town with bike paths running along the bay and connecting east and west and downtown with UWF.” IF we insert that, then we get, “If you are smart, and you want to use your smarts to make your hometown of Pensacola, FL, a bicycle-friendly town with bike paths running along the bay and connecting east and west and downtown with UWF, then you can grow up to raise money and interest in Pensacola and get those bike paths built, doggonit!”

When the myth goes like this—the whole “if you’re smart” and then “and you want to use your smarts for yadayadayada,” and then “you grow up to yadayadayada”—intelligence seems something other than an assurance of wealth. It seems more like a tool or an instrument to achieve the purpose of the person using the tool.

Think about how we use tools. We put them to all kinds of purposes—some good, some indifferent, some bad. You could use a can of paint to spruce up your patio furniture (good), or you could use it to paint lines for your back-yard football game (not particularly good, but nothing wrong with it), or you could use it to scrawl graffiti across the walls of public buildings (bad). Another example: You could use your computer to design a card and compose a poem to send your grandmother in rehab (good), or you could spend a lazy Saturday morning playing Minecraft (meh!), or you could use it to hack into Wells Fargo accounts, steal identities, and inconvenience thousands of people’s lives (bad!). Take a hammer: you could use a hammer to build a house for your new little puppy that will give him shade in the summer and warmth in the winter (great), you could drop a hammer to the bottom of your pool and have a little fun diving after it (that’s harmless), but Roman soldiers used a similar implement to nail Jesus to the cross. Tools can be put to good uses, to indifferent uses, to bad uses.

We’re here today to acknowledge that you have this tool—a really powerful tool—a strong mind. That you have such a tool is not, however, where honor lies. Honor lies in the purposes to which you put your tool. Some people will apply their tool to good purposes; some to indifferent purposes; some, unfortunately, to bad. I don’t honestly

expect any of *you* to intentionally use your tool to evil ends. I do believe, however, that the Sirens singing from Suburbia inviting you to use your tool to secure a certain life of leisure for yourself seem lovely. They promise a basement with a man-cave, the SUV of your choice with a complimentary decal, again, you choose—“Salt Life,” “Apple,” “Vineyard Vines,” “30A,” “26.2.” They promise a KitchenAid stand mixer, a Cuisinart food processor, maybe a warming drawer, and seasons passes to Blue Wahoos games. Again, our formula: If you are smart, and you want to use your smarts to get seasons passes to blue Wahoos games, then you can grow up to have seasons passes to Blue Wahoos games. And there’s nothing wrong with that—nothing wrong with the SUV or the Salt Life or the KitchenAid. But these things are indifferent. They are neither good nor bad. Yes, you *can* use your tool to get these things, but in these things lies not the honor we hold out to you.

Honor lies down your path when you put your tool to good purposes. What will you use your smarts for?

If you are smart, and you want to use your smarts to help people who were abused as children overcome the demons that haunt them, then you can grow up to be a therapist.

If you are smart, and you want to use your smarts to help poor city-dwellers pursue healthier lifestyles, then you can grow up to plant community gardens in local neighborhoods.

If you are smart, and you want to use your smarts to relieve people of chronic pain without their becoming addicted to opioids, then you can grow up to be a good doctor.

If you are smart, and you want to use your smarts to work toward peace and harmony in world politics, then you can grow up to be a diplomat.

If you are smart, and you want to use your smarts to proclaim God’s Word and celebrate God’s Sacraments in a fallen and broken world, then you can grow up to be a minister.

Because you are smart, you enjoy a special freedom, freedom to accomplish a lot, but more importantly, a freedom to orient your life toward and apply your tool to a certain purpose. You are utterly free. Neither I nor any other teacher nor your parents nor this school can decide for you what that purpose will be. You must decide. May I, though, remind you of just a few passages of Scripture?

Jesus says, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”

James says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble.”

Jesus says, “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.... as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Isaiah says, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”

NHS honorees, more than likely, you will one day be a high-achiever, a community leader, a spokesperson, a visionary. But what will you achieve? Toward what will you lead? For whom will you speak? What morrow will you behold? You *will* put your smarts to some purpose. What will it be?