

College of Coastal Georgia
Commencement Address - May 8, 2009

Regent James A. Bishop, and Dr. Valerie Hepburn, President of the Coastal College of Georgia. I am grateful to you for being selected to address the first graduating class of the College of Coastal Georgia. I am indeed deeply honored.

At the outset, I would be remiss in not recognizing, again, the good fortune of the community in having two persons who coalesced their efforts to create the College of Coastal Georgia as a four year institution. First, Regent James Bishop, who with his indefatigable energy, his vision and perseverance crisscrossed the state innumerable times to finally persuade the Board of Regents to approve the creation of a four year college for Coastal Georgia. Regent Bishop's next stroke of brilliance was in selecting Dr. Valerie Hepburn to accept the acting presidency of the new college and a short time later the full presidency. She, with equal vigor to that of Regent Bishop, earned accreditation of the College by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges in an unbelievable five months, a prize that generally takes two to three years.

Turning to you, the Class of 2009, I remind you that you are the first ambassadors of the College to the public and academic community of Coastal Georgia. So, what can you do to make it the most significant event of your lifetime.

From an adverse perspective, it appears that time has dealt you a cruel blow to make your commencement at a dismal, depressing, economic moment generating a lack of confidence and distrust in our financial system.

It seems that we are reaping the harvest of the 1960's moral standards when the motto was to "do your own thing." This preface produced a condition where much of the nation lives in fear of crime. A blizzard of drugs has engulfed society. Even our private language seems degraded and uncivil. The traditional family and its promoting such habits as being law abiding, doing homework, parental obedience and the like, seems no more. In short, public moral standards seem at the lowest ebb in memory.

This brings to mind the admonition of great historians like Arnold Toynbee and Will Durant that Western Civilization cannot endure without high moral and ethical standards and that morality cannot be firmly established in the absence of a religious faith.

Nonetheless, you must realize that you are in a unique position. The current economic climate presents you with an incredible opportunity – not just to achieve great material success, but the opportunity to direct economic and social change.

Our capitalistic society has been undermined, not merely by bad behavior at the corporate level, but largely by greed and self serving individuals. While many may do nothing and accept a corrupt system, a system without rules or honor, it will be up to those of you strong enough and inventive enough to embrace this challenge and impose change.

As we look into our future lives, I am sure that we are frank to admit that, regardless of one's religion or philosophical persuasion, we all have a desire to make our brief, transitory existence on earth, a meaningful event that will somehow become immortal even in an infinitesimal way and thus attain our measure of immortality irrespective of how it may otherwise be attained.

Perhaps in repetition, the dangerous erosion of moral standards, particularly as has been displayed in contemporary times by the enormous fraud some of our major corporations have inflicted upon the public by the highest level of corporate leadership in the business community and by the enormous display of greed, without regard to good moral ethics.

Moral restraints such as honesty, honor, personal integrity, being law abiding, were all trampled in the dust bin of history as of no moment.

As I have said, such practices have become common place in today's commercial and securities world activities, and this virus seems to have infected the community of government officials. Increasingly we read where they have been charged and convicted of embezzlement and downright thievery.

You must not become infected or tainted by such a virus. And on the contrary you must seize upon the myriad opportunities that will confront you today, to display your strong support of high moral and ethical standards. You must resist the temptation to play the game of current practices to gain the profit of the moment no matter the cost to your reputation, or your honesty, and integrity.

I say to you that this class of the year 2009 of the College of Coastal Georgia bonded by shared experiences has the opportunity to begin to restore and emphasize the venerable rules of yesteryear such as honesty, honor, integrity, the solemnity of the shake of a hand. While the result may seem imperceptible, remember Mother Theresa's comment that the ocean was created one drop at a time.

Whether or not your efforts and contributions are recognized, nothing can rob you of deep satisfaction of knowing that you have contributed to the general welfare. And this would establish the Class of 2009 as a beacon, first in Coastal Georgia, of a restoration of the high ethical and moral standards necessary to restore and sustain our civilization, and culture, and also the members of the class to be included among the persons who Maxwell Anderson said "lift the level of the age in which they live so that all persons stand on higher ground."

So I charge you to go forth with the love and affection and pride of everyone in this room; go forth with the love of what is honorable and noble; of the grandeur and dignity of your own character; and find a life of service and fulfillment that will bring you great joy and happiness and true success. I remind you that your future is limited only by a failure to follow your dreams.

I wish you Godspeed.