

2019 Senior Project Assembly

Remarks by Brian Gilmore '02

Have you ever felt the weight of a single moment? A moment of time, stuck *in* time, calling out to you from amidst the crashing noise of the other 86 thousand seconds that fill any given day?

These are the moments where it feels time almost stands still. Time standing out of time, where you and I momentarily peel back the cloud of unknowing and see things with a clarity rarely felt otherwise.

These can be the moments when we feel most alive. Rare as they can be, such moments do present themselves to us. Often, they come to us as gift—feeling like we have done nothing to earn them, or sometimes like we don't even deserve them. Usually, we look toward big, public moments to provide the benchmarks of important change in our lives, moments that we can spot from a long way off—birthdays, graduations, weddings, a new house, a new child. Culminating sporting events and productions for which we have prepared long and hard. No doubt, all these are important moments that can reveal much to us about ourselves, others, and our place in the world.

But many times, powerful moments catch us by surprise, manifesting themselves to us in the midst of ordinary exchanges and interactions. A friendly word from someone you didn't expect noticed you. A tender hug from a dear friend. The feeling of pride that comes from knowing you have put forth your best effort. New love. A call from an old friend. Indeed, there are countless unexpected moments that warm our soul and spur our imagination to explore new possibilities.

Two days from now, thousands of eighth graders from across the St. Louis Metro Area expect an important letter in the mail. In homes all around us, there will be moments of excitement & celebration—and moments of sadness & great disappointment. Without exception, opening the letter will be a single moment that impacts and changes lives. You remember the day you got yours. A moment that changed the direction of your life and brought you to this community.

But, experience will teach us, these moments which feel stuck in time are not always moments that feel life-giving. We may pick up the phone, and the voice on the other end shares news, news that shatters life as we know it. Sometimes, we hear someone call our name, and we know what is to come. Our stomach leaps, dread washes over us, and for a moment, breath isn't there. Trouble awaits; accountability looms. But ready or not, we face it. Challenging moments often force us to confront a difficult choice: do we run away, or do we brace ourselves for the turbulence of unknowing ahead—yet, at the same time clinging to a heart full of hope, and trust, that the light at the end of the tunnel beckons us to new life. To become stronger than we were before.

I asked the seniors to share with me a single moment from their Project that impacted them in a significant way—however they understood that sentence to be. In response, they articulated

moments imprinted on hearts during Senior Project, moments that stood out among the rest of their month away. Moments that have begun to shape their imagination. Here's some of what they had to say:

- Helping Solomon take his test to become a citizen
- Sitting with Kameron during PE class
- Hearing stories of the home life of those I served
- A little girl, inducing her own seizure
- Children, growing up around crack and heroin, maintaining their joy
- Overhearing a phone call from a homeless family
- When the kids placed their trust in me to teach them
- Three students moving into a higher-level English class
- Ali's hard work and joy while struggling to read
- Dancing with residents to music from the 1940s
- When he realized I was leaving, the boy cried.
- A wheelchair-bound vet telling me, "cherish your legs while they work"
- Through his voice box, Kelly said, "I need a tissue."
- A woman saying to me, "my heart is not handicapped."
- Even though he couldn't speak, he grabbed my hand.

I suggest to us all that Senior Project is a way to create time and space for these ordinary exchanges and moments to occur. Moments that challenge, moments that break us down, and moments that fill hearts with happiness and wonder. In fact, I have no doubt that a single moment can change the way we think, act, and even how we look at the world. Just a single moment. Seniors, today you have the chance to give voice to some of these moments. To put to words ways that you felt your heart and spirit moved.

An ancient Greek philosopher, once wrote, "Time is the most valuable thing a man can spend." Soon, the rest of us have the time and opportunity to listen to these stories—and try them on for size. Can we imagine a world and situation like the one being described? For a short bit of time, can we fully inhabit a time and a space to share and respect these impactful moments for our senior class?

Finally, all of us must consider *what to do* when faced with our own potent moments – moments that we innately feel are important. How do we respond? Where do we go? I propose to us two things.

- Don't forget them! Write them down. Take pictures. Document the occasion. As time goes on, come back to them. Certain moments burn themselves into our memories, but their impact can take years and years to unpack. Carry them with you along your way.
- Ask God for the grace of understanding. Pray a simple prayer, asking God to speak to you. Just don't forget to stop talking and start listening – listening to what God might have to say.

And so, we pray in the words of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

Seniors, it's good to have you back.