

Parents Weekend Multifaith Service
University Public Worship, February 27, 2011

“Gratitude” by Cate Gerrity

My experience at Stanford started with gratitude. That immense overflowing kind where you can't even feel anything else. I remember vividly the first Sunday of freshman year, during the “peace”, when I turned to my roommate and soon-to-be best friend. We hugged and teared up. How lucky were we? About to embark on four years of the best education in the world? How blessed were we?

I floated through my freshman and most of my sophomore years. I took classes that looked interesting and eventually decided to major in psychology and minor in religious studies. I limited myself to one religious studies class per quarter because they always make me think, a lot. Winter quarter of my sophomore year my world was rocked when I took a class on Spirituality and Social Transformations. We learned about Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King, read Reinhold Niebuhr and Dorothy Day. While I was inspired by these people, a creeping sense of guilt began to infiltrate my mind. And it grew. I asked myself, what am I doing for this world? What am I doing, sitting in a classroom? How am I serving as a student? Is this selfish? The gratitude I once felt for my experience had waned significantly and was being slowly replaced by a fear that I did somehow not deserve it.

God and I talked a lot that quarter. We talked when I got emails about the Peace Corps (“God, wait, is this a sign?”), we talked when I had a fantastic conversation with a peer (“God, thank you so much sending me here”), and we talked when I got scared, (“God, what am I going to do with a degree in psychology and religious studies?? This is so impractical!”). In a school where

the spiritual is swept under the rug, my friends had trouble understanding why I was questioning my time here. They told me, “you are going to have a Stanford diploma. That’s worth a lot! Just be happy.”

But God was patient with me, and he had a lesson in mind. In an effort to start serving more, I started tutoring a child from East Palo Alto twice a week and I marveled at his progress. He really struggled with fractions. One day, after a rough tutoring session he came up to me with a note. It said, “Dear Cate, you make me feel: $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = \text{whole}$ ”.

As I biked home I thought about my purpose here. It hit me slowly. This education here is a gift of freedom. I have the freedom to choose how I am educated. What classes I take, who I befriend, how I participate. This tutee reminded me that we can interact with the world in a positive way wherever we go, and wherever we are.

My choices in my education will shape me into a tool to make this world a better place. What a gift. My responsibility? It is to learn well. At Stanford we are learning knowledge more often than practical, how-to skills, and it is because this school and its leaders trust us to take this knowledge and figure out the how-tos. For me, that means turning to God. When I turn to God, here I am, back at square one. Gratitude.

I’m grateful that I have the freedom to explore and seek out this education. It isn’t selfish, it is a gift. The person I become is someone who does want to give back, who will want to give back. The only thing I can do is do this well. Learn well. Use that freedom well. And I will grow into the person that he wants, he intended. And for that, I am incredibly grateful.