

The Rev. Joanne Sanders
Stanford Memorial Church
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THE SHELTER OF HOME ALUMNI WEEKEND

There's a wonderful little nugget in the Christian New Testament letters to Timothy (who was a developing youthful leader of that time) that essentially says: *Do not let anyone put you down because you're young. Teach with your life: by word, by demeanor, by love, by faith, by integrity. Cultivate these things. Immerse yourself in them. Do not neglect the gift that is within you. The people will all see you mature right before their eyes.*

You might be thinking, now hold on here! It's Alumni Weekend at Stanford and some of us aren't feeling so young anymore. But I'll come back to that in just a moment. Allow me to start by telling you a very heartening story about someone quite young: a 6 year old named Joe of Long Beach, CA. who was recently was presented a surprise thank you gift by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and a Long Beach community leader. When Joe, a first grader, heard about the California Kids Care program established to encourage students to raise funds for the victims of Hurricane Katrina, this 6 year old decided to donate his entire savings of \$250 to the relief effort. Joe was saving his money in the hopes to buy himself a puppy – a rare white German shepherd puppy that he intended to name Marshmallow.

When it was discovered about his particular sacrifice, a truly selfless gesture that inspired fellow students, school staff, and countless other adults who heard about his donation, the first grader was presented this week with a surprise gift at a school assembly – a white German shepherd puppy named Marshmallow.

Very young indeed, we couldn't argue with the fact that Joe was teaching with his life and no one would dare put him down on the basis of such a generous gesture. Who knows where and how he gleaned such perspective, such character, but we could speculate perhaps it was at home.

So while this weekend does not have you reminiscing back to the first grade, it certainly has you hearkening back to your college days, when you left the shelter of one home and found your way to what would become another, here on the Farm. For surely this time of youth, of a new home, was considered an asset, the moment, the opportunity for growth not only for ourselves but also for everyone we came in contact with. And surely you made mistakes, but it wouldn't be the only time you would no doubt later, much later, discover. And you might possess a private little list of regrets, but what better time, what better place, and under what better circumstances could there have been to be able to have done those things, provided with meals 7 days a week, shelter, a host of diversions, a great address a lifetime worth of resume building. In the college years, we get to try the things that only youth may allow us to. We can live in a learning environment that will test us in so many ways and aid us in discovering our capacity for tolerance, for engagement, for passion, for sincerity, for fellowship, for building community. As the

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letter to Timothy points out, in youth we have the chance to set an example, to teach with our life, by word, demeanor, love, faith and integrity.

It's been suggested that we talk about the college years as an unworldly, unreal experience. Well, as one writer put it - if living in the world were a good deal more like living in college, where strange and odd people learn how to get along together, learn how to behave in the interest of the common good, and to subvert their own personal agendas for the larger sense of the group, the class or the community, the world would be a better place.

In the shelter of this particular home, a life's work began to discover, cultivate, and exercise the gifts that were within each of you. It is what you were and still are called to do, and for many of you that began right here in the arcades, classrooms, labs, fields, and buildings of this very place.

There are many gifts – too many to enumerate that have been cultivated in this place. Perhaps it was the gift of friendship – what it means to be a faithful friend and to have one. A relationship that is based on trust, loyalty and genuine affection. Or the gift of fortitude – the capacity to endure strange, difficult, bad and demanding things. Life is full of disappointments, frustrations and failures, and perhaps here you discovered the gift that allows you yet today to endure, persevere, and to overcome. Maybe you discovered the gift of faith – that there is more to life than mere evidence. That there is a living, loving God.

Whatever gifts we may have cultivated in our youth, I dare say it ought never be considered a waste, but rather a golden opportunity in which we find shelter and strength throughout our lives, even down through the years and on this day. It has been said: ***The world is not a playground, but a schoolroom. Life is not a holiday, but an education. One eternal lesson for us all; to teach us how better we should love.***

Today in October 2005 while tropical storms have nearly reached the end of the English alphabet and almost two weeks after the earthquake in Pakistan and Kashmir many of the injured have still received no medical attention, we might wonder if we've reached the limit of our compassion, our generosity, our faith and our love. In the face of fatigue, we might wonder if those of us who have much will be able to stay the course and keep pace with the need of those who have nothing. Our answer cannot lie in the ability to predict the future, because we can't. But we continue doing what we can, putting at work those things we well may have been taught here in the days of our youth. Praying for strength and guidance, putting one foot in front of the other, responding to others in times of crisis and need, allowing our own hearts to be deeply changed.

Many of us are not young anymore, but we still are faced with the challenge of learning how to live together, to subvert our own personal agendas for the larger good, to behave in the interest of the common good. While no one agency or country or person can end human suffering alone, we can all decide what kind of person, or country or community

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we will be. We can learn that from the oldest and youngest among us – even a first grader.

May the shelter of this home that once was in the days of our youth still yet be a reminder of how and why we embrace that one eternal lesson – to teach us how better we should love – by word, by demeanor, by faith, by integrity.