

Good morning, folks. It really is a pleasure to stand before you this morning with this opportunity to reflect a little on my time at Stanford. I'm currently in the midst of my thesis so stop me if I start citing, or if a loose paragraph about the visual rhetoric of the political poster as surrogate body has somehow slipped into my comments. In a little under a month, myself, Mark and I'm sure a number of you will be participating in the longstanding rituals and traditions of this University and thereby entering a distinguished company of scholars: we'll be donning the cap and gown, receiving our diplomas, running across the field in a screaming mob while throwing beach balls and wearing hula skirts. And I just want to take some time this morning to reflect a moment on how I have seen tradition and ritual function in my life, particularly as a student at this University.

In my home community we have a great many rituals and traditions marking the major stages of life. As an Episcopalian we recognize everything from the first communion to the 21st birthday as cause to celebrate, by which I mean get together and eat, of course, the proper ending to any ritual. But the tradition I'd like to talk about today is the coming of age ritual.

In my culture when a young person comes of age we basically send them out into the wilderness, not much fun in Texas, as far as necessary for them to not break anything and we abandon them there for a given period of time. We tell them to just get it all out of their systems, go crazy, act out every inclination or desire they had suppressed in order to be good children. You don't even want to hear some of the stories. Then after a certain period of time we invite them back as adults. It's a little tradition we like to call college.

It's funny, mostly insofar as anyone might now call us adults. And while I know that for a great many of us there still lies a long road ahead before we can take our place in the world, I do think it is important to reflect a moment on the tremendous thing that has happened in this place. The tradition of Stanford as a ritual space where class after class comes of age and figures out what it means to live in the world.

Freshman year. Day one. I moved in with boxes upon boxes, most of them packed too full to tape shut, along with Target and Walgreens bags and way too many loose items stuffed into my parents' minivan. What could have probably been accomplished in three trips up and down those two flights of stairs took 7 or 8 due to my disorganization, and I was still finding things wedged between the seats as I went out for a final lunch with my folks. They were leaving me with all they could, jumbled and disorganized as any good 18 year old tends to be. I was a mess of ideas, values, traditions, prejudices, dreams, questions and faith, and looking back I don't really know that being at Stanford I've acquired anything truly new. Instead Stanford has been a place of interrogation, refinement and unpacking.

You see, at Stanford I've finally had the chance to unpack what it means to come from where I'm from, to have been raised the way I was, to face the world I was given the privilege and the opportunity to experience. And I've had the chance to take possession of what I've unpacked, to internalize it, to make a self out of it.

I personally came to Stanford with a Bible in one hand and a cell phone with my high school sweetheart on speed dial in the other. When I realized that she could very easily be a he, I dropped both. Part of that unpacking for me involved bringing out into the open what I had long held closeted and close. When I came out in my freshman year I thought I'd have to start over. I thought to myself, "this is the end of it, my faith, my

family life, my sense of self, time to rebuild.” But as I rebuilt I realized that the pieces, while differently ordered were familiar.

My first trip home after coming out to my folks, was Easter. My dad is a priest so we went to worship Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Each time I knelt before the altar though I felt alienated from what the action had meant before, alienated from an ashamed self that had once knelt to confess unholy desires. But I knelt beside my parents, with my brother, I knelt in communion with them and I continued to kneel for another two years until finally kneeling meant nothing of what it had once and it was simply my knees, an altar rail, myself and my God. Like a vessel I had emptied the act and found in it a space where I could once again encounter my God, me as I was, My God as My God always is.

It is this that we encounter here, this spiritual quest for the honest encounter, the emptying out, the honest self encountering the always honest “Other.” The vessels for my knowledge were given me by my parents, my friends, by this University but the knowledge that fills them, that’s what we learn to create anew here, that’s where spirituality, tradition leads us forward in the mission of this institution. I am nothing new under the sun and on June 18 will be made nothing new and yet in enacting the traditions of this institution we each recreate this University, we have recreated this University by emptying and refilling its classrooms, its TA mailboxes, its dorm rooms, offices, webspaces and worship spaces. Just as we learn to recreate what it means to be children of God, living in fellowship as siblings, students and friends. This radical emptying, refilling project of spirituality, passed on to us by our parents, our priests, rabbis and spiritual leaders is the tradition we will celebrate as we leave this place, the tradition of recreating the world and ourselves, honestly, openly, and to the glory of that which gives us life, anew, this day and always. To the class of 2006 as we take our final steps towards moving out into the world, I wish you all forms of blessings. And to all of us I pray that we might continue in this honest exploration of our relationships, studies and those things which bring us joy that we might experience them in the fullness of our holy and created beings, encountering them and ourselves anew as we were, are and will be. May you all be blessed..