

Chapel Talk
Daniel T. Roach
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We return in the season of epiphany, a time of long voyages, darkness, endurance, and the sudden manifestation of light. The story of the wise men setting off on their journey resonates with us as we make our way into the rigor and challenge of a new year. It is cold, dark, and foreboding outside, in T.S. Eliot's words, "the very worst time for a journey."

Epiphany reminds us of the power of endurance, resilience, faith, and perception. It reminds us that meaning, recognition come only through grueling challenges and moments of doubt, frustration, and despair. Epiphany suggests that if we surrender, sacrifice, and relinquish our daily needs, obsessions, and material objects, we will be honored by the sight and understanding of something profound, miraculous, and unexpected in our lives.

In his great story, "The Bear," William Faulkner depicts the coming of age of Ike McCaslin as he travels into the wilderness for a sighting of a magnificent bear. His mentor, Sam Fathers, has taught him that to become a hunter and a man he must find his way literally and metaphorically in the wilderness. So Ike proceeds alone and after a long and futile pursuit realized he cannot see the animal until he has surrendered all the accouterments of his life.

It was the watch and the compass. He was still tainted. He removed the linked chain of one and the looped thong of the other from his overalls and hung them on a bush and leaned the stick beside them and entered it . . .

Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon's hot dappling, not as big as he had dreamed it but as big as he had expected, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him. Then it moved. It crossed the glade without haste, walking for an instant into the sun's full glare and out of it, and stopped again and looked back at him across one shoulder. Then it was gone. It didn't walk into the woods. It faded, sank back into the wilderness without motion as he had watched a fish, a huge old bass, sink back into the dark depths of its pool and vanish without even any movement of its fins.

I argue that we who live, create, and work at St. Andrew's must make similar relinquishment to glean the power and majesty of this place. We give up our habits of selfishness, egotism, and meanness of spirit to embrace the full potential of living in peace and in respect and in appreciation of each other. We drop our obsession with social media to learn the art of authentic friendship, expression, and love. We reject an alcohol/drug culture that erodes the trust between student and student and students and teachers and instead embrace an ethic of hard work and tenacity. We surrender habits of lying, deceit, and cheating to uncover the authentic, individual, and communal rewards of integrity. We relinquish these things that ultimately make us cowards and somehow see the mystery, purpose, and meaning of life.

I envision St. Andrew's as the best school it can possibly be, as a place infused with engagement, purpose, and life. We will have to learn how to be tough, how to be tenacious, how to confront frustration and failure if we want to have an epiphany of achievement in our lives, whether that achievement comes from the classroom, athletic field, or art studio. We have to embrace a work ethic that rejects weakness, surrender, excuses . . . We have to get into the habit of working with more consistency and creativity.

We must not be afraid to strive for academic and human excellence in all we do at St. Andrew's. We, who have so much, must never settle for a culture that is lazy, stagnant, or complacent. If you give everything you have in a journey of compassion, intellectual curiosity, and commitment, you will witness epiphanies everywhere. We as a faculty join you in this journey of hope and enlightenment.