

LANE SHETTERLY

GRAVEN AWARD CONVOCATION ADDRESS

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President Colson, Dean Bouzard, Pastor Beckstrom, my good friends Dr. Stan and Mavis Graven, Lloyd Graven, distinguished faculty and staff, students and members of the Wartburg College community.

I am honored – and humbled – to be recognized with this year’s Graven Award. The legacy of the Graven Award is at once inspiring and intimidating. It is inspiring to look back at the work and the lives of Judge Henry and Helen Graven, and the tremendous contributions they made to this college and to the church they loved and served. It is inspiring to look at the names of those outstanding people – world leaders, many of them – who have been honored by this award in the past, and the contributions they have made to the world, this nation, their church and their communities.

But it is also intimidating to find oneself in such company. Speaking as a country lawyer from a small town in Western Oregon, that’s not a crowd I am often associated with.

As I contemplated this moment, I thought long and hard about what I might have to say to you that would be meaningful; that would inspire; that would be equal to this award and the *real* heroes who have received it before me.

But it occurred to me that heroes aren’t just the people we build monuments to honor, the ones whose names we read in the newspapers and later in the history books.

Tom McCall, Governor of Oregon in the early 1970s, a visionary and a true Oregon hero, said this about heroes: “Heroes are not giant statues framed against a red sky. They are people who say: This is my community and it’s my responsibility to make it better.”

I never had the pleasure of meeting Tom McCall, although I was honored a few years ago to receive the award that bears his name, given by the Oregon Chapter of the Sierra Club for stewardship of the land and environment.

But I have had been fortunate to meet many heroes over my years of life in public

service. Some are the heroes who will no doubt someday have a “giant statue [of them] framed against a red sky.” But most – and the ones who have made the greatest impression on me – are of the second type; those who simply say, “This is my community – my world – and it’s my responsibility to make it better.”

When I think of those heroes I have known, I think of Marie Davis. Marie is a nurse from the small hospital in my community, who in 1984, got on a plane as a medical mission volunteer and flew to Ethiopia, which was then in the depths of the worst drought and famine Africa had seen in more than a generation. It was her first trip overseas. She tells the story how, as they were approaching, from the air, the refugee camp in which she would be working, she saw a line of thousands descending on the feeding camp. She said, “They carried dead children on their backs and dragged toddlers behind them, barely able to walk themselves.” Terrified at the scope of the need she says, “I started to pray and didn’t stop for six weeks.”

That was 1984, and now, more than 40 missions later to some of the most dangerous, poorest, neediest places in the world, she is in Haiti today, ministering to the victims of the earthquake last month, carrying on, unsung, the work that God laid on her heart to do.

When I think of the heroes I have known, I think of Adam Cornell, a young man who came from a broken home and grew up in a series of foster families. Through grit and determination and the grace of God, Adam rose above his circumstances and worked his way through college and then law school, to get an opportunity at life that few kids who come up through our foster home program can hope for. But it wasn’t enough for him to have succeeded for himself. He wanted to help others.

When I was serving in the Oregon legislature, he approached me with a dream to create a scholarship program for former foster kids, to help them go to college and help themselves the way he was able to do. It was 2001, and we were in what was then one of the worst recessions since the Great Depression, and I told Adam I thought he had a great idea, but I was doubtful that we would be successful in creating and funding a new scholarship with public dollars in that environment. But he was determined, so I introduced his bill and together we worked it through that long legislative session.

Adam took it on as his personal crusade, to meet with every legislator to tell his story, and persuade them to support his dream. After months we got the bill through and the scholarship established, but still the legislature hadn’t budgeted any dollars to actually fund it. We had only built an empty shell of a scholarship program. Rather than accept this “moral victory” as the end of his work, Adam started again, and together we worked for the rest of the session with legislative leadership and the members of the

Ways and Means committee until we were finally successful in securing the funding to make the scholarship a reality.

Now, almost ten years since the scholarship was created, dozens of young people coming out of foster homes have been able to go to college and get degrees and make something of their lives that would not have been possible but for the vision and determination of Adam Cornell.

Adam and Marie are typical of the many heroes I have been blessed to know, whose tributes and honors are the lives they have changed. Very few of us will be those heroes who will be remembered with statues "framed against a red sky," but all of us have within the potential to be one of those heroes like Adam and Marie, who say, "This is my community and it's my responsibility to make it better."

Who are the heroes you have known and how have they influenced your life?

One of mine was my father. He was a decorated WWII veteran who went to law school, settled in the small town in which I was born and raised and in which I still practice law. He and my mother raised six children, and lived a life that was rich in personal and professional accomplishments, and in service to his community and his church. It was from him that I learned, by example, the value of service; the obligation we have to give back to our church and community that give so much to us. And I learned something else from him that has carried through to my own life and law practice, and in particular to my life in public office – the ethic of professionalism and collegiality rooted in personal respect. It's an old fashioned ethic, but one that we can see, from the newspapers and blogs today, is sadly in short supply in the public arena.

Ironically, I learned this lesson from a murder trial.

It was during the summer when I was 13 or 14 years old. My father had been appointed to defend a man charged with a notorious murder in our community. Being summertime, I thought it would be a good opportunity for me to attend the trial, and exciting to see it from start to finish. What I saw was a vigorously prosecuted and zealously defended case, with my father and the district attorney both making objections and arguments and counter-arguments, and the judge making the calls between them, keeping the case under control. After the case went to the jury it was close to midnight when the phone rang at our house. It was the court calling to say that the jury had reached a verdict and my father needed to go down to the courthouse to be with his client to receive it. He got me out of bed and I went down with him that night.

As the courtroom was readied and the defendant was brought from the jail, I got to

spend a few minutes with my father and the district attorney and the judge in the judge's chambers, and what I saw that night amazed and enlightened me. Waiting for the courtroom to be readied they chatted casually about local sports, politics, and events of the day. Watching the trial I had gotten the impression that my father and the district attorney were mortal enemies, and the judge regarded both of them with disdain. What I saw that night was that they were friends and colleagues. It was a revelation to me, how each of them had had a role to play in the courtroom, and each had played out that role vigorously and conscientiously, but at bottom they regarded each other with respect and even friendship.

That night I learned an old lesson. Over 400 years ago, Shakespeare said it this way: "Do as adversaries do in law; strive mightily but eat and drink as friends."

As you know, I left my law practice for a time, to take a detour to the world of politics and public service. When I ran for office, I made a commitment that I would carry that same ethic of professionalism, collegiality and respect into the political world. I chose to believe that, while others who served with me in public life would have different opinions, based on their own life experiences and party affiliations, they all came to public service honestly and with good intent to serve their districts and their constituents to the best of their ability.

It sounds naive, but after seven years of elective office and four years of executive, I am satisfied it was the right assumption to make, and have been disappointed on just a handful of occasions.

Thomas Jefferson put it this way: "Men, according to their constitutions and the circumstances in which they are placed, differ honestly in opinion." And, he observed, "Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle."

I enjoyed a successful term of public service, dealing directly with some of the most contentious issues of our time. In the legislature: taxes and tax policy, gay rights, assisted suicide, abortion, guns. As director of the state land use agency I found myself in the middle of a three-year statewide debate over the future of our land use policy that moved from the ballot box to my agency to the courts to the legislature and back to the ballot box before we were able to successfully resolve it.

In all of this, I have witnessed in my own life and experience the value of respect, collegiality and professionalism in personal and political relations. I strived to develop and maintain good personal relations with as many of my fellow public servants as would have me, regardless of their party affiliation or ideology.

One of my best friends during my years in the legislature was a woman whose voting record on issues of consequence looked like a mirror image of mine. But she was a woman of deep faith and commitment to her values, and that connection between us bridged our political differences.

I was a loyal and effective member of my majority caucus, and served in a leadership position. But on occasion I had to stand up to my own caucus in defense of the legislative rights and prerogatives of members of the minority party. And when I did, not only did it serve to protect the integrity of the legislative process, it also strengthened my relationship with those members and built trust between us. And in a business where one's word is the coin of the realm, that respect I showed for those members of the other party, and for the institution, served to make me a more effective legislator.

Those of you who spent your youth in Sunday School should recognize this as nothing more than an application of the Golden Rule - doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.

It's not rocket science. But our nation's political institutions seem to be in a forgetful mood these days, and that is deeply troubling.

I'm not a historian, but I know enough about history to know there are no permanent majorities. And when the party in power at any given moment in time fails to remember that, and fails to treat with the respect they deserve those who are out of power - and when the party out of power acts only to frustrate the ability of the party in power to discharge its right and obligation to govern, turning their back on the art of honorable compromise- together they foster a downward cycle of attack and counter attack that is unproductive in the short term and dangerous for our republican form of government in the long term.

I'm not talking about a return to that brief time in our history before the rise of political parties and partisanship. I don't even think partisanship itself is a bad thing. When the time comes to make hard decisions in government, you need to have someone - for better or worse - in control.

And we're a tribal people by nature. If we declared today the end of political parties, we would have a new alignment of them - or maybe just a realignment of the old ones - tomorrow. So partisanship is not the culprit.

But the style of partisanship today, at the national level and in too many states, is too often an ugly and exclusive kind of partisanship. It breeds a culture of us and them,

good and bad, black and white.

Faced with a myriad of difficult and complex issues critical to the future of our nation today – national security, climate change and environmental issues of historic proportion, a severe economic dislocation that has led many commentators to describe the first decade of this century as “the lost decade,” budget shortfalls and deficits that threaten the long term viability of essential government services and programs, need I mention health reform – all demand the time and attention of committed leaders doing serious work. Together.

Instead, we see too much posturing and positioning, which has led to stalemate and frustration.

So what are we to do about all that? First, don’t panic. I’m an optimist by nature. We’ve been through worse – you may recall reading in your history about the civil war – and we’ll get through this.

Second – don’t despair. And don’t withdraw.

Don’t become so frustrated with our current political culture that you tune out. This is the time for engaged and informed citizens, young and old, to pay attention, to get involved. This is the time for a new generation of leaders to say, in the words of Tom McCall, “This is *my* community – *my* state, *my* country, *my* church – and it’s *my* responsibility to make it better.”

You have some tremendous opportunities right here at Wartburg. I have been impressed to learn about the Center for Community Engagement, and the opportunities for service learning, community partnerships and more. Seize those opportunities.

In the political arena, I believe there is a growing sense that we need to change the culture of governance and politics. Seek out and support those candidates for office who support that change, work for them, help them, and then hold them accountable when they take office.

I have no doubt that there are those among you who, yourselves, will be among that next generation of leaders. Whether that is your lifelong ambition or – like me – something that comes to you out of the blue, more like Moses, surprised by his encounter with God in the burning bush, if the opportunity presents itself and you feel led, say, “Here am I, Lord, send me,” then go for it.

Life is not a spectator sport. A life well lived demands action.

"This is my community, and it's my responsibility to make it better." The beautiful thing - and the demanding thing - about that statement is that it's true no matter where you are, no matter the stage on which you are acting, from your neighborhood, your campus, to your church, your community, your state, your nation, your world.

And it's good through every phase of your life. This isn't rehearsal for "real life" somewhere out there, down the road, off into the future. It's here and now.

You are part of a community today, and it's your responsibility today to make it better.

Will there be a statue to memorialize you and your deeds someday, framed against a red sky? Maybe. Probably not. But I truly believe a life well lived - and the lives of others made better by it - is its own reward.

Serve well. Live well.

Thank you. And God bless you.