

## **Valedictory Address May 22, 2021**

**Matthew David Holcomb**

Vice-Chancellor, Deans, Associate Deans, faculty, staff and especially to my family, thank you. I hope you all realize the impact you've had on not just mine, but all of our lives. To my fellow graduates, it's truly a privilege stand here and see the faces of the best group of peers, colleagues, and, most importantly, friends I could have ever asked for. Thank you.

When we arrived on campus last fall for our senior year, I don't think any of us knew whether we should have packed for the semester or for just a few weeks. We were uncertain. We didn't know what the future held, and for the most part it was out of our control. We made significant sacrifices and we spent over a year in a state of limbo. And what a year it's been. It wasn't that long ago when it seemed highly doubtful our families and friends would even be joining us for graduation.

But we're here. We made it. We made it to May. It wasn't easy, and it wasn't without sacrifice. Above all, what has led us here is that we set a goal. And sitting here today (without masks) I think it's safe to say we've accomplished that goal and then some. We were unwavering in pursuit of this goal and we stayed the course for over 8 long months. While we were steady and objective with the actions it took to accomplish this goal, we always kept an open mind. We were quick to pivot in response to new information, and we were swift in dealing with whatever came our way.

The uncertainty we've overcome and the goals we've accomplished as a class are no different from the ones in our personal lives. To have the privilege to speak to you today has been a goal of mine for years. And it was accompanied with plenty of uncertainty.

Each and every person sitting here today had goals they set out to accomplish over these past four years. It might have been an athletic goal (all-conference award or a conference championship), an academic goal (English or Math), a goal in the arts (theatre, music, or visual arts), a personal growth goal, and the list goes on. Whatever those goals were, I hope you will all take a second to realize all that you have each of you, individually have accomplished. That's what this week has been about it. It's what today is about, it's what this ceremony is about, and it is without a doubt what this speech is about. It's about celebrating each of you.

So I would ask everyone here on this football field, graduates and parents, to just stop. Simply stop for a moment and look around. Look at who's on your left and look at who's your right. Just let time stand still. Savor this moment. There's no do-over, there's no re-run, this is it. This is graduation. Whatever emotions you have, embrace them. And most importantly, just be grateful.

As we join together today to celebrate all of the goals you have each individually accomplished, it won't be long before you've set new goals. And it won't be long before uncertainty presents itself in new ways. As incredible as Sewanee is, this isn't our final destination. Our futures are bright. They're filled with hope, future accomplishments, celebrations, friendships, and successes we can't even imagine right now.

As we leave these gates and advance into this next chapter, we're not going alone. Whatever uncertainty we face or goal we set, each of us is leaving with a part of Sewanee. We're leaving with great friends, we're leaving with an unparalleled liberal arts education, and we're leaving with all of the experiences we've enjoyed these past four years. We're leaving with the interactions we've had with our professors, mentors and advisors, with our coaches and sports families, and most importantly we're leaving with the interactions we've had amongst each other. These memories and experiences don't go away, we're taking them with us for good, wherever we go. And whatever uncertainty we face or goal we set out to accomplish, I'll put my money on this class, and on the piece of Sewanee that each of you are taking along for this ride. Just make sure you tap your roof, on your way out.