

# GRACE CLASSICAL ACADEMY

... Κατανῶμεν ...

Let us consider...



## GCA 2017 Commencement Address

By Susan Tolbert

I am so thankful for the honor of speaking at the graduation of these nine wonderful seniors. You all have a special spot in my heart. I have seen most of you grow from gap-toothed first graders, building houses on the playground out of twigs and rocks and walking down the hallway in straight lines. If I have not witnessed your exploits firsthand, I have heard of many through my daughter. I have been to soccer and basketball games, plays, recitations, a monk banquet, field trips, and Greek Olympics. I have hosted movie nights and 80's prom dress-up parties. I have enjoyed camping, hiking, roller skating, skiing, and goodness knows what else with you. I have enjoyed seeing you all find work in areas that have allowed you to grow, even creating your own work and transition from learners into teachers and doers. I have been so happy to see your hearts soften with love for others: holding Bible studies, volunteering for others at camps, music events, church, and now more recently, handing out food at apartments right here in town, where one is sure to find people who need it. I have rejoiced that you all have been able to show God's love to all types of people. As I hear about your future plans, I am excited about the diversity among your cohort. Nine people following nine different paths. I know that, just as God has made each of you unique, God will use each of you in your chosen paths.

The friendships you have developed with one another, which probably wouldn't have been very deep in a class of typical size or focus, are

The mission of Grace Classical Academy is to provide an education designed to help our children know the love, grace, truth, and holiness of our glorious God and, from this understanding, strive for excellence in knowledge, wisdom, and service.

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education only  
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sweet to see. Despite the very different personalities represented here, your common relation in Christ has created bonds which will give you a communion with one another despite the separation that miles, years, and life circumstances bring.

Tonight, I'd like to talk about a question I get asked at least once every year. Some poor, unsuspecting student (after a particularly vexing math topic) asks, "Why do we need to know this?" For the record, don't ever ask a math teacher why one needs to know how to do some obscure math function. I am fully aware that no one needs geometry to fold clothes correctly or polynomial equations to figure out a budget. However, I rarely address the question fully because I know they are asking out of frustration, not because they really want to know "why?"

I have been waiting for a situation in which it is proper to address the question. Parties never really seem to provide the opening I'm looking for, but standing at a podium in front of a captive audience seems to be the opportune time! To be perfectly honest, these students we are honoring tonight, who can conjugate verbs and unsplit infinitives, could have quit going to school long ago and had the skills necessary to survive. Each could make macaroni and cheese and probably ride the city bus. They could have found a job somewhere and made enough money to afford a small apartment with a roommate. Really, what more does a person need? Why did their parents pay GCA to fill their heads with Latin conjugations, logical syllogisms, poetry meters, blood pathways, and periodic table trends. The subjects of GCA go far beyond what is necessary to sustain life. If the purpose in going to school is just to make a living, then the diploma awarded tonight is superfluous.

Modern Americans tend to view education pragmatically. We categorize the value of a class by whether or not it will be useful in obtaining a job or instrumental in some other way. We analyze the value of pursuing a specific career by looking at the cost of schooling vs. potential earnings. We justify this because schooling is so expensive—and it is. College tuition at a public university has risen from about \$5,000 to about \$10,000 since the year 2000, not including room and board. If the cost of room and board is added, the price doubles. The average class of 2016 college graduate has about \$37,000 in student loan debt. These statistics are truly concerning. However, if we evaluate education only in the light of pragmatism, or its practical value, this pragmatism strips worth from the learning process and replaces it with a counterfeit value.

Imagine ordering a big, juicy burger from your favorite burger joint. The server brings it to your table and sets it in front of you. It still sizzles slightly. You eagerly smell the burger; the aroma of grilled beef fills your nose. You rotate your plate and look at every bit of its perfect, juicy aspect. You even touch the bun to feel the warm springiness of the bread. When you have experienced your fill, you tip your server and leave satisfied.

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What is wrong with this picture? You didn't eat it! To fully appreciate that big, juicy, burger, it must be consumed! In your ignorance, you didn't know, yet you were still (somehow) satisfied. Can we assert that the satisfaction you experienced without tasting the burger was able to rise to the level of satisfaction of someone who did taste the burger? By no means! Even though both left satisfied, you (who did not have the taste experience) had a much "thinner," if you will, experience than the one who was able to fully appreciate the burger by eating it. Unfortunately, you didn't even realize this big, juicy burger had more to offer than an aroma and springy bun!

In the ocean, there is an octopus-like creature called the cuttlefish. In response to its environment, the cuttlefish will change color, texture, and shape to become invisible—even as it swims. And it accomplishes this feat instantly. In addition, this creature is colorblind. Now, one obvious question must be asked: how does the cuttlefish know what it needs to look like to blend in? What environmental cues is it picking up? Obviously, it cannot see the colors around it; therefore, it must be responding to some other information; information humans cannot see. We are fully unaware of our ignorance of some data that the cuttlefish knows intuitively. The cuttlefish, in its own, simple, cold-blooded way, lives in a world of data we can't even sense.

Now, think about the electromagnetic spectrum. This is the scale on which electromagnetic radiation of different wavelengths and frequencies is organized. It encompasses all values of energy. There is a teeny, tiny portion of this spectrum that we can experience in the form of visible light. But this represents only a miniscule portion of the spectrum. In order to understand how miniscule of a portion humans can sense, imagine the electromagnetic spectrum as a filmstrip stretching 2,000 miles. The portion of visible light would be about one frame. There is a lot of electromagnetic radiation humans cannot sense or perceive. Scientists have built instruments to help use and see some of these regions, like microwaves, x-ray machines, lasers, radio transmitters; but, without these machines, we are not able to interact with these regions. Yet, some creatures do. They can act on parts of the spectrum that we do not. For example, bats and whales navigate by ultrasonic sounds, which are mostly of a frequency humans can't even perceive. Birds have an extra type of cone cell or color receptor in their eye, which is sensitive to ultraviolet light. This helps them to see many portions of the electromagnetic spectrum necessary for their survival.

Similarly, cows align themselves like compass needles in a field, north to south. How? We recently discovered that cows have some sort of magnetic sense, probably similar to the magnetic sense that whales and migratory birds use to help their navigation. But, cows aren't migratory. What in the world would this redundant sense be used for?

These onerous assignments in school have one important task—to expose the areas of God's creation about which we know little, releasing us from our blissful ignorance and showing us an ever-expanding world, a world we can sense and enjoy if we just know enough to be aware of it. Education increases our ability to fully experience life, even instilling a drive to do so (call it curiosity), by understanding what God has created us to be, by understanding his creation, and by expanding our facility to appreciate it. As C.S. Lewis says in The Weight of Glory:

*It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.*

The offer of infinite joy keeps us in an attitude of humility. It also illustrates why we educate. We don't want to be satisfied making mud pies in the slums. We want to enlarge our capacity to learn, to appreciate, to know. However, work is required. Learning the grammar of a subject, just like learning the grammar of English, is not necessarily fun or easy.

Those who play the piano, who have struggled to play scales perfectly with even time and even loudness, sit

in the audience listening to a gifted piano player with much more appreciation than those who don't play. They know how difficult those beautiful chords and delicate melodies are because they themselves know what it takes to master them.

Reading Shakespeare is difficult the first time around. He added over 1,500 words to the English language, words like zany, pajock, skim milk, and impetico. However, with perseverance, reading Shakespeare illuminates the human experience with exposure to his carefully and artfully crafted language. His uncanny insight into the human condition exposes human nature for all of its brilliance, nobility, duplicity, and complexity. Shakespeare can provide a foundation by which we can gain footing to understand the range and beauty of God's human creation, arouse emotions by which we can more fully empathize with situations and contexts, and provide a basis by which we can appreciate other literature.

Many of us remember memorizing the elements of the periodic table in high school. Some of us even had to learn the atomic masses. These seemed like pointless exercises at the time. However, learning the different roles of elements in the periodic table—elements which compose matter around us, and life within us—helps us to appreciate that Na and Cl separately are explosive, but when combined in a one to one ratio, provide a tasty topping for popcorn. Knowing the trends of the periodic table and understanding the order in which the electrons fill out the orbital shells of the atoms allow us to appreciate how the electron structure of iron, nickel, and cobalt make them particularly suited to be magnetic, or why certain elements tend to form molecules with certain other elements, or why some, like uranium or plutonium, are very efficient sources of energy.

Similarly, if we confine God to the dusty confines of an old theology book, we miss out on so much of His nature. It does take work, just like school requires work. But don't be satisfied just learning the grammar of God; learn God. Get to know Him. Struggle and spend time with Him. The God of our Sunday school class is much larger than we realize. No matter how well we think we know God, He is much larger than we can, at this moment, appreciate. In Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul prays for the people in Ephesus. Among other things, he prays for strength. Strength for what? As Paul says, "strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge..." What kind of wild, deep, boundless love is it that requires strength to understand? Imagine: similar to the burger we experienced, but only limitedly, right now, we don't have even the capacity to understand what we are missing in our relationship with Christ.

Additionally, we must understand Paul's idea that this "...love surpasses knowledge." As teachers, our purpose has been to help you not only gain knowledge, but become someone who can seek out knowledge. How can we prepare you to understand a love which surpasses knowledge? We can pray for it. I pray that God gives you a hunger for this. Pray for it with me. Every day of your life can be spent in experiencing Christ's love just a little more. His love is boundless. It is inexhaustible. It is stronger than our failings. It is greater than we can imagine. Every day. Oh, that God would expand our ability to know him!

So as you graduate from GCA tonight, I hope you walk across this stage not with a sense of finality for an era ended, but with a new appreciation for why we celebrate the end of your required schooling with the word "commencement," a word which actually means "beginning." We aren't celebrating the end of your schooling, but the beginning of a new era of learning for you, in which you are able to use your expanded ability to drink in this world that God has given us with a voracious appetite. Not because knowledge is a means to an end, but so that you can be strengthened and enlarged to appreciate with ever-increasing capacity God's revelation of Himself through His creation, His love, and His Word: to more fully know God.

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# Interviews with Miss Tabor and Mrs. Wilson

*GCA added three new faculty members this year: Mr. Dustin Bush for music, Miss Alyssa Tabor for 6th grade, junior high, and high school classes, and Mrs. Renee Wilson in 2nd grade. We will profile Miss Tabor and Mrs. Wilson in this newsletter and Mr. Bush in the spring newsletter!*

**Alyssa, tell us about your background and how you came to GCA:**

I completed a Bachelor's Degree in Communications, and then began working at the library. I felt like any of the positions in communication were not what I wanted to pursue. I had a love for what I did at the library, and I decided to pursue a Master's Degree in Library and Information Sciences. I completed this program, and thought I would get a full-time librarian position, but the Lord began to lead me in a different direction which eventually ended at GCA.



**How did you transition from library science to education?**

I had always had teaching in the back of my mind: I love education, and my mother was a teacher. I knew if library science did not work out, I would seek teaching opportunities. My mother suggested I look to become a school librarian and to look at private, Christian schools. In the process, I came across GCA. As I was praying about my next steps and what I wanted to do, my heart was drawn to teaching. It was pretty clear. When I saw the application for Grace, I completed it. Then I realized I knew plenty of people familiar with GCA who complimented the school. It was clear that the Lord was bringing together these things, so that I would be here.

**As we are nearing the end of the 1st quarter, what has surprised you at this point in the school year?**

One surprise has been the amount of interaction GCA students have with each other. I love that some classes have been together since Kindergarten, or even K4. I love to see the really strong relationships these kids have forged. Another surprise has been the insight and spiritual depth of some of the students I teach, particularly the 6th grade. One day, one of them prayed and thanked God for teachers who cared enough about them to discipline them and write their name on the board. Multiple students have noted discipline and rules as blessings from God. They also see the importance of sharing the Gospel with others. The depth of the insight has been a refreshing surprise.

**What do you like to do in your free time?**

I like to read—I usually have four or five books going at once. Different genres to go with the different times of day and my different moods.

**If your students could only remember one thing from this year in your classes, what would it be?**

I want them to remember the Gospel. I want it to be clear to them what the Gospel is and how they can share that with other people. If they do not take anything else from my classroom, that is fine. As long as they know the Gospel, have accepted it for themselves, and can share the Gospel, then I am good!

*Thanks Miss Tabor! We are grateful to have you with us!*



## Interviews with Miss Tabor and Mrs. Wilson

**Renee, talk to us about your background and what led you to teaching?**

When I was in high school and junior high, I helped with VBS and everything I could do that involved kids: I loved it. Everyone told me I should be a teacher, and I took their advice. I attended Hannibal-LaGrange College and graduated in 1990. Following graduation, I taught at-risk junior high students for my first year in the classroom. These were kids not wanted in their own classroom, so they were sent to me and I taught all their subjects. Soon afterwards, I decided I wanted to stay home and have children. My husband and I have four kids, and I homeschooled them for their entire education; my youngest graduated a year ago. While homeschooling, I taught junior high history for five years at Gloria Deo Academy, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. At the beginning of this summer, Mr. Moss contacted me about a full time position. I interviewed, prayed, and felt like God was opening the door for me to teach at GCA. And now, here I am!

**Tell us about homeschooling your kids and transitioning to a classroom teacher.**

When my kids were homeschooling, I could be flexible. My kids participated in a lot of sports, and I coached cheerleading. If we needed to have school on a Saturday, then we did. Also, the need for discipline is greater. In a classroom, we have to have more structure, so that has been a shift for me. Besides, if my kids needed discipline at home, I had other means available.

**What are your favorite subjects to teach?**

History would definitely be one but Bible by far! It has really been neat to see how much my second graders know about Scripture and how much they want to know. Their curiosity has also forced me to realize how often I use a word they may not understand. Just today, “birthright” was in our Scripture reading. We got to talk about its meaning, and pauses to discuss meanings of words happens frequently. I enjoy this because I get to stop and think, “What does this word really mean?”

**What kind of surprises have you had in the first quarter?**

I have had several students who have left school very excited because they did not get their names on the board. Names on the board is a regular occurrence in 2nd grade. Also, each student has his own personality. It is awesome to see these character traits, even at such a young age, and know that God will use them for His glory. I have tried to pray and ask God to give me the wisdom to see these kids as He sees them. It is neat to think about how God loves these kids, and it helps me to love them like He does.

**If you could control what your students remember about their second grade year, what would it be?**

The main thing I would want them to remember is this: I cared about them, and I had a love for Jesus, and they could see this love through my actions. I would want them to see God and let Him make a difference in who they are and their relationship with Jesus. This would bring out my happy dance!

*Thanks for your time, Mrs. Wilson! We are thrilled to have you at our school!*

**This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.**  
**John 15:12**

# First Quarter Pictures



Nathan and Isaac enjoying Family Fun Night!



Garland with a camo day life hack.



Brad and Mr. Moss working on cow dissections.



Vail covered in grass between classes.

Ryker and Nathanael learning the settings on their DSLR cameras.



## Staff Birthdays

### October

10/2— David Hyde

10/22—Melanie Brookie



### November

11/8—Marion Winkler

11/11—Charlie Williamson

11/14—Stephanie Beeson

11/15—Michale Nelson

11/27—Jill Sellers

### December

12/5—Robin Harrison

12/26—Tracy Mercer



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### *October 2017*

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 1     | Tuition Due                             |
| 9-13  | Fall Break— No School                   |
| 17-18 | Optional Parent/<br>Teacher Conf. 4-6pm |
| 20    | Early Out 11:30am<br>Teacher Training   |
| 26    | Family Skating Party<br>6:00-8:00 PM    |
| 27    | Nifty 50s Day                           |
| 31    | Reformation Day                         |

### *November 2017*

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 1     | Tuition Due  |
| 3     | History Day (1st<br>through 8th Grade)/<br>All-School Open House<br>6:30pm |
| 5     | Daylight Savings<br>Time Ends  |
| 17    | Fabulous Foot Day  |
| 20-24 | Thanksgiving Break<br>— No School  |

### *December 2017*

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 1     | Tuition Payment Due   |
| 1     | Choir Concert 7:00pm  |
| 7-14  | Finals Week<br>(7th-12th)   |
| 15    | Christmas Dress Day<br>End of 2nd Quarter<br>All-School Chapel<br>Early Out: 11:30 AM |
| 18-29 | Christmas/New Year's<br>Break — No School   |