



It has become a novel art form in of itself: the commencement address, not to mention its own science in trying to figure out who exactly it will be to give it. Do you go with alumni or someone famous, having to find one who can hopefully keep the attention of graduates who would probably prefer just getting the diploma and throwing the cap in the air and moving on about their new life? So, I want to tell you about a woman who was long sought after in her young life for many such speaking occasions in Rachel Held Evans, who

grew up in a rather strict Christian family, and so naturally enrolled in schools that followed that same mindset, all the way through college. She was so admired by her classmates that she was asked to deliver the address at graduation. An “honor, [she says she] took...seriously, [preparing] for weeks amidst all the final exams and senior parties, working through multiple drafts and soliciting feedback from...parents and professors.” The basic idea being that it was the job of those students to go out and convert the world to their way of following Jesus, with not too much grace or compassion or mercy thrown in.

Several years later, Rachel hit a crisis in her journey of faith. Oddly enough, desperately searching for that grace and compassion and mercy, and wondering if it could be possibly found in the world, including in the very church that she was a part of from the beginning. She started a blog, back when blogs were more the hip, cool thing to do, and invited other faith wanderers to join in this intentional and safe space to ask the very questions that may not have been dared allowed in the supposedly more sacred spaces. Eventually, Rachel looked back to her own commencement address that she gave to her college class. And she eventually wrote on that very blog:

*Class...let the world change you too.*

*Because that's exactly what happened after I descended that platform and walked into a world inhabited not by the straw figures I'd been taught to defeat and convert, but by flesh-and-blood human beings who didn't stick to the [stereotypical] script, a world less characterized by black and white certainties than by mile after mile and year after year of thick, impenetrable gray.*

*I thought the world needed my answers, but as it turns out, I needed the world's questions. I needed to learn how to doubt well, listen better, and be humbled by how little I know. I needed to discover that [the church I grew up with was] just one table in Christ's banquet hall, the Great Cloud of Witnesses far more sprawling and diverse than I'd ever imagined.*

*The world, it turns out, is not all weeds. There is evil growing, certainly, and fear and hate. But I've found life sprouting out of all sorts of unlikely soil, wheat enough for a lifetime of harvests.*

*I am so thankful for the...coworker who mothered me through my first reporting job, for random trips [beyond my comfort zone], for conversations lasting until 2 a.m., for the...tattooed Lutheran pastor who gave me permission to love the church again.*

*These people and these things changed me for the better...Oh I resisted at first. Worried about compromising my beliefs, I clenched them more tightly and dug in my heels. So convinced it was my job to be Jesus to others, I nearly missed the chance to let others be Jesus to me—to teach me, heal me, love me.*

*So if I had it to do over again, I would tell my classmates:*

*Before you can make your mark on the world, let the world make its mark on you. Be curious. Stay open. Nurture the humility it takes to admit you can get it wrong. And I would tell myself: “Rachel, in a few years, you’re going to doubt everything you said in your speech just now, and—guess what—you’re going to be okay.”*

So, Phoebe and Payton, oddly enough, as the church celebrates the moment when Jesus ascended into heaven, and the disciples cannot help themselves but keep staring up; a perfect segway for commencement speakers to invite you to reach for the stars. Not to say you shouldn’t, but just be prepared for the brightness of God to be rising right around you, too. Be prepared to unleash all the light you have to give to others who desperately need you just as you are, but be just as prepared to be blown away by their light, too. Be prepared to hear over and over and over again that this world is too far gone, and that it’s almost up to you now and all your classmates to go out and save it. But I hope you don’t forget that that is not your responsibility. Jesus already took care of that, and not just for you, and not just for us, but for so many people we are not willing to give God credit for more often than not. I hope you not only hear and share that Gospel in whatever career path you take and even when you’re off the salary clock. I hope you also experience it from the people you serve as well, as if God’s world can indeed make its holy mark on you, too. As if love and compassion and mercy are just as real and needed from you, and for you to receive it as well, no matter what path your life takes. So, for Phoebe and Payton, and all those who will join them on their most vital journeys of faith, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

Source: [Let the World Change You: A Commencement Address Do-Over](#)