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Commencement 2013: Justice, Mercy and Humility

Steven C. Bahls
Augustana College

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Commencement 2013: Justice, Mercy and Humility

Augustana College Commencement 2013 Steven Bahls, President of Augustana College

Members of the Class of 2013: It is my honor to congratulate you on behalf of the faculty, staff and administration of Augustana College. We are so proud of your accomplishments. And I speak for our faculty and staff when I say that we are so very proud to have had the opportunity to serve you.

The Augustana College Class of 2013 distinguished itself in the classroom, on the athletic field, on the stage and by volunteering in the community. You have fully and responsibly used our Augie Choice program, with more than half of you traveling abroad and nearly 60% of you having had internships in settings across the country and around the world. These experiences have stretched you and helped you grow into the responsible citizens you are. Students, those of us who have gotten to know you, know that the future is in good hands.

To the parents here today: This is the tenth May commencement I've presided over at Augustana, and it is by far the most special one for me. Because, like you, I am the parent of a student who will walk across this stage today. Like you, I have seen first-hand the magic of Augustana College. How students become wise by learning to turn the crystal by looking at complex problems from different angles. And students, when you came to Augustana as freshman you were a bright group, so sure of your many opinions. It warms my heart, and, I assume the hearts of your parents, that you are now critical thinkers. Critical thinkers who know the difference between an opinion and a well-informed opinion.

Students, I've heard from many of you that you will be back for Homecoming to see our new buildings. And did I mention that — as a thank you for putting up with all of our construction this year — the Class of 2013 will have its own Homecoming breakfast in our Center for Student Life... and I will be the one flipping the pancakes? I hope you'll come back and join me!

Before too long, I will award your degrees and, as tradition has it in higher education, formally welcome you to the company of educated women and men. But before that, permit me to share one last piece of advice. I urge you to use the skills you've gained at Augustana to pursue the injunction of the prophet Micah: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly.

Justice. Plato said that "knowledge without justice ought to be called cunning rather than wisdom." You have a choice about the knowledge you've gained. You can take one of two routes. Your knowledge can be employed for your own self-interest and self-gain. That would be the easy route. Or, with the benefit of wisdom, the knowledge you've gained can be to seek justice for others. No doubt, in and out of the classroom, you've had many discussions of economic justice, environmental justice, racial justice, social justice and intergenerational justice. Students, you have the wisdom to know injustice when you see it. But also have the courage to call out injustice and the courage to reform systems that perpetuate injustice.

And remember mercy. In today's world, under the guise of pursuing justice, we tend to judge people by their

worst moment. Many demonize those who are different or less fortunate, thinking they have made mistakes and now they are suffering the deserved consequences. William Shakespeare said in the *Merchant of Venice* that “earthly power is most like God’s when mercy tempers justice.” Shakespeare also said: “Consider in the pursuit of justice none of us would find salvation.” Student, we more often find salvation in relationships and not in victories. We often find salvation when we give people the benefit of the doubt. When we give people a second chance. And when we recognize that “There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

But the attribute of Micah’s injunction that is most overlooked is the last – the admonition to walk humbly. I am so proud of you for working hard at Augustana. But please remember you did not do it alone. You are where you are because you stand on the shoulders of others. You stand on the shoulders of parents and grandparents who believed that the first rung on the ladder of opportunity is a college education. You are a beneficiary of the alumni of this college who have provided funding for our stately buildings, our generous scholarships and our growing endowment. But most of all, you are the fortunate recipients of the many talents of those who make up the faculty and staff of Augustana. Let us be humbly thankful for the many gifts we’ve received.

I have no doubt, students, that you will pursue justice, love mercy and walk humbly. You have shown it to me. I have seen it in your passion for service, and in your many fundraising and volunteer efforts to help those who are in need. And you have done it in the Augustana way – quietly and with steady determination.

Students, use your education well. Always remember to temper justice with mercy. And walk humbly, recognizing that your achievements are not yours alone... and that many have helped you along the way.

Students, it has been an honor for all of us to be a part of your lives. We are very, very proud of you! May God bless and keep the Augustana College Class of 2013!



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| Accounting | Communication Studies | Geography | Music | Pre-Optometry |
| Africana Studies | Computer Science | Geology | Music Education | Pre-Pharmacy |
| Anthropology | Creative Writing | German Studies | Music Performance | Pre-Physical Therapy |
| Art | Economics | Greek | Neuroscience | Pre-Physician Assistant |
| Art History | Elementary Education | Graphic Design | Non-Profit Leadership | Pre-Seminary |
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| Biochemistry | Engineering Physics | International Business | Philosophy | Psychology |
| Biology | English (Literature) | Japanese | Physics | Religion |
| Business Administration | English (Writing) | Landscape Architecture | Political Science | Scandinavian Studies |
| Chemistry | Environmental Management | Latin | Pre-Dentistry | Secondary Education |
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