

HONOR AT HAMPDEN-SYDNEY COLLEGE

Remarks for the Honor Convocation August 18, 2017

Perhaps only your graduation from Hampden-Sydney four years from now will be a more important moment in your college career than what you do here tonight. Tonight you separate yourselves from the rest of the world and become Hampden-Sydney men. In a day and age, when nearly everyone has bought-into the view that “it’s okay if nobody gets hurt” or that “it’s okay if you don’t get caught,” you are instead pledging here tonight to hold yourself to a remarkably different standard. Not only are you pledging that you personally won’t lie, cheat, or steal, but you are also pledging that you won’t accept these behaviors by your fellow students.

In the coming weeks and months, I will welcome opportunities to talk with you about the history of our Honor Code; I’d like to talk with you about the religious and spiritual basis for the morals and values enshrined in our Honor Code; and I’d like to share with you some of the stories students and alumni have told me about how they’ve lived the Honor Code and how this code has impacted their lives.

Tonight, though, I want to share with you a more personal message: My job gives me the privilege of taking pride in the academic successes of Hampden-Sydney students, reveling in your co-curricular accomplishments, and finding great satisfaction in watching you mature during your time here. But I also share in your shortcomings and failures. Among the disappointing moments I have are those—fortunately rare—occasions when I’m notified that a student is being suspended or expelled for an Honor Code violation. Please hear me: Shortcuts when traveling down a highway are a great convenience, but ethical or moral shortcuts on the road of life are never satisfying and take you nowhere. If you violate the Honor Code, you have a very high probability of being caught, and if you are caught the consequences are grave. My greatest hope for each and every one of you is that you live into this Honor Code, that you encourage one another to live into this Honor Code, and that we meet again at that other important moment—your graduation—four years from now.