

---

**President's Address  
Winter Commencement  
December 13, 2013**



**David L. Parkyn, President**

---

Four words. A noun, a verb, an article, and a pronoun. Four simple words. That's all it took to inspire a nation.

Four words that inspired our nation fifty years ago; four words that have inspired each succeeding generation.

Four words, perhaps the best known four words in all of American history. Better known than "four score and seven," better known than "we hold these truths," better known than "A more perfect union."

Our nation recalled these words during the first week of this school year—your final semester at North Park. Late in August, fifty years ago, Martin Luther King greeted a crowd of hundreds of thousands on the mall in Washington, DC, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

Fifty years ago, Martin Luther King proclaimed these four words, "I have a dream."

"I have a dream," he declared, "that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.'"

"I have a dream," he professed that day, "that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

"I have a dream," he trumpeted, "that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

How did Martin Luther King come to this dream? Certainly it came over the course of his entire life, short as this was. Yet it was a dream, historians tell us, rooted in substantial measure by what he learned, by who he met, and by what he experienced while in school—first as an undergraduate and then also as a graduate student. What Martin Luther King learned in school, who Martin Luther King met in school, and what Martin Luther King experienced in school molded together to frame his dream, direct his life, and change our world.

So you can imagine what my question is of you, on this night of your graduation from North Park University—“Have you discovered your dream?”

This is not, of course, fully a fair question. It’s not as though a dream is discovered once and for all. It’s not as though once you take the right course, meet the right person, and have that one right experience you will put these three together and instantly discover your dream.

No, a better question tonight is this: “Are you on your way to discovering your dream?”

This has been our goal for you—this is what we mean when we say that an education at North Park prepares you for a life of significance and service.

Where do you discover your dream? How do you mark your way toward your dream?

One answer at North Park is this: in service. That’s right, discovering your dream starts in serving others. And during your years at North Park you’ve been invited, encouraged, cajoled, sometimes even required, to serve others. Call it service, call it loving your neighbor as Jesus does, call it loving kindness as the Hebrew prophet does—call it anything you like but get ahold of it because discovering your dream starts in serving others—while you’re a student and after you graduate.

Jesus told people they would find God, they would discover their dream, when they fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, visited those in prison. When the Hebrew prophet commanded that we love kindness it wasn’t an esoteric ideal—it had a reality rooted in the lives of those around us. See someone who is hungry, offer them food. Or thirsty, share your water. Or in need of winter clothing, give them your coat. Or ill, take their temperature, Or in prison, make a visit. Or new to the neighborhood, open your borders.

Serve, North Park proclaims, and in service you’ll begin to discover your dream. Continue to serve after you’ve graduated and you’ll continue to discover your dream.

But what of significance? Here’s the secret of significance: join your service with your learning, join your service with intellectual curiosity and insight, join your service with informed reflection, and you’ll uncover significance. Bring the two together, let one inform the other, and then reverse the order. Understanding of this magnitude frames a dream.

This is what the writer of Proverbs is addressing in the words Professor Rabe read this evening. “Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding.” This is significance. “Guard the paths of justice and preserve the way of God’s faithful ones.” This is significance.

Join service and significance, join serving others with understanding others, and you are on your way to discovering your dream.

We are to clothe the naked, yet in doing so we must ask why in our world some have so much while others have next to nothing. This will frame your dream.

We are to feed the hungry, yet in doing so we must ask why millions in some places die of hunger while millions in other places battle obesity. This will frame your dream.

We are to heal the sick, yet in doing so we must ask why some have access to care and others do not. This will frame your dream.

We are to care for the poor, yet in doing so we must ask whether the poor are poor by choice or poor because other people have more than their fair share. This is what Pope Francis this week described as the “widening gap between those who have more and those who must be content with the crumbs.” Pope Francis is seeking to frame our dream.

Linking serving and understanding, joining intellectual curiosity to helping others. We call this significance. The Hebrew prophet called it doing justice.

And this same prophet, in words marked in concrete in the center of our campus, links these two—loving kindness and doing justice, service and significance—to our encounter with God. “What does the Lord require of you,” the prophet asks rhetorically. And then answers: “To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.”

That’s how dreams are born. Bring together our walk with God, our love of others, and our reflection on the world around us, and we journey into our dream.

As of tonight you’re a graduate of North Park University. Now live into your dream—with significance and in service.

God bless you.