



GEORGIAN COURT UNIVERSITY

THE MERCY UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

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GCU Commencement Ceremony Address
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Good Afternoon, President Marbach, Trustees, Cabinet members, my fellow honorees, and family and friends of the Class of 2018. What a glorious day to celebrate the achievements of the Class of 2018! The energy and grace of Georgian Court's physical place and its people have lent so much to the richness of my life. I am deeply grateful to Georgian Court University, President Marbach, and the Board of Trustees for bestowing this honor. I have been blessed with the love of amazing parents, my wonderful brother and sister-in-law, talented and kind nephews, and the dearest friends, each of whom help set my path and every day guide me in pursuit of goodness. Deep and abiding gratitude and quiet service is my only counterbalance to the abundance of good fortune I've had in my life.

At the end of the musical *Hamilton*, there is a song that asks, "Who lives? Who dies? Who tells your story?" I remember turning to my mother and asking who will tell my story. She replied, "you will." So today you have handed me a microphone . . . here's my story.

I first set foot on the Georgian Court campus as a 6-year-old in 1970. It's only taken me 48 years to stand with you as a proud member of the Class of 2018! Georgian Court was a magical place to me as a child when I experienced Mercy through the sisters at St. Mary Academy in Lakewood. My family lived in Jackson when I was growing up. I went to high school in Toms River, at what is now Donovan Catholic. I longed to know more of life and swim in a bigger pond, so I went off to

Syracuse University to learn about the world. I planned to become a TV executive. When I couldn't afford to take the entry level jobs offered in media, I decided to try something different. Sent on an interview at a brokerage firm, I began a life journey of learning and accountability to whom I wanted to be in the world. Commitment to being a person others could respect shaped my path and my decisions, and often made the path more difficult to travel. In an industry dominated by men and with a profit motive, I fought to be heard and to lead with empathy, enhancing the value proposition, not detracting from it. I had an innate sense of my core values, instilled in me by family and my experiences through the years. When I became a Georgian Court trustee in 2004, I found the words to articulate and action Mercy values: justice, respect, service, compassion. and integrity. In some ways, it was an awakening that these values had been my guide all along.

But enough about me, let's talk about you. You're here! You've arrived at this day, the culmination of so much hard work and sacrifice by you and your families. I want you to take a moment and feel the pride and the love of everyone in this arena for your accomplishments. So now what? I am moved, Class of 2018, by your power, your opportunity, your potential. Your foundation is strong, rooted in Mercy and faith, and the persistent pursuit of the Mercy core values. As the song goes, the circle of Mercy is truly timeless, and it begins with you. Like the overlapping circles of a Venn diagram, you alone are a small circle integrally connected to and extending Mercy to your inner circle, those closest to you, and beyond to the outer circle, the wider world.

Mercy must begin with being merciful to yourself. There is a reason they tell you to put your oxygen mask on before helping others. Respect yourself. Don't be so hard on yourself that you become paralyzed to act. Spend your time in service to the person you aspire to be; forgive yourself when you've erred, but always hold yourself accountable to the values and standards you aim to uphold. You enter the world educated and ready to use your voice, in a world that truly needs your voice. But using your voice can be scary. As soon as you take a stand, promote your ideas, share your thoughts, you open yourself to those who will argue against you. Be prepared to fail and to learn but always be merciful with yourself, and try again. What I have learned is it matters less WHAT you want to be in the world than WHO and HOW you want to be in the world. When you decide that, you are ready to take on the work of making YOUR world a better place.

Your inner circle includes those with whom you have a personal relationship, family, friends. Don't take the people closest to you for granted. Sometimes accumulated hurts make being merciful a

challenge. Remember that relationships are a two-way street. Meet those you love at the intersection of respect and compassion.

Making THE world a better place is such a clichéd expression for a commencement speech and sets an expectation of lofty goals and global impact. I was deliberate a few sentences ago when I referred to making YOUR world a better place. *Your* outer circle, *your* broader community, where *you* are a member and have an affinity but where you don't have personal relationships, can and will be greatly enhanced by your caring. Don't overlook the impact of a small act of kindness. In the words attributed to Martin Luther King Jr., "If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way." Your merciful actions toward those with whom you don't have a personal relationship can effect change beyond measure.

It isn't always easy to travel this path. So how do we build the strength and resilience to continue in the face of adversity? My advice is to find the people and the words that bolster you, give you confidence and strength. I grew up with a mom whose favorite saying is "We will find a way or we will make one," and a dad who paraphrases Winston Churchill, who said, "Never, never, never give in." As a teen, I had a poster on my bedroom wall with a beautiful winter scene and a quote from the French philosopher, Albert Camus. I read it every day (repetition is also important): "In the midst of winter, I found there was in me an invincible summer." The extended Camus quote inspired me even more:

In the midst of hate, I found there was in me an invincible love. In the midst of tears I found within me an invincible smile. In the midst of chaos, I found there was in me an invincible calm. In the midst of winter, I found in me an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there is something stronger, something better pushing right back.

As you begin the next part of your life journey, I pray that you find within you invincible Mercy, that your eyes will be open to the myriad opportunities to show Mercy, no matter how small, that your heart will learn to listen as well as speak, and that love in all forms will be your guide. As you celebrate this life achievement and milestone, remember that Commencement is not an end, but a beginning. Armed with everything you need for a happy and productive life, begin again. Godspeed.