

## There is goodness within all of you

My message to you this afternoon is about goodness. Yours. If there is one truth I hope you carry with you as you leave university— one truth that echoes not only in your mind but settles into your souls — it is that there is goodness within each and every one of you.

Now, when I say goodness, I'm not talking about always following the rules or that you are somehow inherently aesthetically pleasing to others. The Goodness I'm referring to is the deeper sense of self that is an animating essence of character — to the reality of you that you bring to the world every day — the radiant integrity that moves us to kindness, justice, and love. It is a core moral orientation: to will the good, to act with care, and to see the world not as a contest, but as a communion.

Goodness is essential. It is ephemeral. And it is eternal.

It is essential, because without it, the scaffolding of achievement collapses into hollowness. Essential, because a brilliant mind without a luminous heart darkens the world rather than enlightens it. Goodness is the foundation, the true north star of a life guided by meaning and purpose.

Goodness is ephemeral, because it often lives in moments so small they vanish before we name them: a door held, a silence honored, a friend forgiven, a tear witnessed. It comes and goes in flashes — not because it is weak, but because it responds to presence.

And goodness is eternal, because when it is real, it endures. It ripples across situations and circumstances. With it, you influence and inspire your communities, families, friendships. It leaves its trace in lives you may never meet, shaping futures you may never see.

In my experience, the opportunity to see truth, beauty, and goodness in others is one of the most meaningful things in the world. One of the beautiful facets of the calling of being a teacher — this serendipity that has rewarded my life with joy, purpose, and meaning — is the opportunity to realize and help foster the awareness of goodness in the students within my care.

Let's be real now: We all know that you don't always make the right decisions. Sometimes you don't always perform as well as you had hoped. Sometimes you don't necessarily act the way you should, and sometimes you say things that you probably shouldn't say in that moment. We, the old adults in your lives, still believe in you. And we know that those moments, those episodes captured with your script called "growing up in this world," do not compromise the truth of goodness that is within each of you. In life, we often bury and hide

this goodness away from our sight — beneath our doubt, our fear, our self-judgment. We bury it under layers of shame, under the memories of failure, under the pressure to be something or someone other than who we are. Society, at times, can make it harder — tempting you to measure worth in achievements, to mistake visibility for value.

But goodness? Goodness doesn't ask for applause. It doesn't need credit or grades. But, thankfully, it waits quietly, even stubbornly, until successfully transcending whatever tries to suppress it. YES: This is the goodness we have seen in you. In the ways you carried one another through hardship. In the ways in which your ethical spirits filled you with the courage to speak when silence was easier. In the laughter that bounced across this campus bringing a sense of joy to all who could hear it; in your questions that were inspired by your curious minds; the hope you infused with your hearts into our classrooms, studios, fields, forests.

Understanding goodness comes from somewhere deep. It's not forced, but it is there. And I hope each and every one of you sees the goodness you have within you.