

# “TRUE SUCCESS”

Welcome to President and Mrs. Egge, Principal and Mrs. Brue, Faculty and Staff of Lutheran Brethren Schools, Parents, Alumni, Friends, and Classmates.

I've been asked to say a few words to all y'all tonight. In thinking and praying about what I could say, I decided to talk about something that you probably think about fairly often—at least in your more contemplative moments—and that we seniors will probably think about a lot as we enter “the real world:” *success*.

What does success actually mean? I grabbed *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* and, after I figured out how many c's there are in “success,” found this definition:

1. a satisfactory completion of something
2. the gaining of wealth and fame [and, my favorite]
3. one that succeeds.

These are, I suspect, what most humans go after in life. Wealth and fame are at the top of the success ladder, satisfaction and enjoyment are next best. All around, the human race is looking for success.

I recently read a book entitled *Sold Out*, written by Bill McCartney. Bill was a man with an incredible resumé. He had, by hard work, determination, and an overflowing measure of zeal, worked his way up the ranks of football and ended up turning Colorado University's team from losers to winners. By anyone's standard, Bill was a success. But, how does he describe his life? In his words:

I was locked in a system called professional coaching. Yet I contend the *system* is anything that prevents us from living out the gospel mandate. It is letting society determine how we're going to live life. It puts success, career, money, and prestige ahead of God and family. It's a recipe for a lukewarm heart. Allowing our hearts

to become captivated to the system—whatever that may be for an individual—dulls us to that which is most important.

By God's standard, Bill had yet to succeed.

What does the Bible have to say about success? In the words of Jesus Himself,

For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? (Mark 8:36, RSV)

Wealth, fame, satisfaction, and even enjoyment—although they can be very good things—cannot be the focus of our lives for true success. If they are, what is the result?

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money; nor he who loves wealth, with gain: this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them; and what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes? (Ecclesiastes 5:10-11, RSV)

We cannot take the results of our earthly successes with us to Heaven. Living for success here on this earth is not going to matter in eternity.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6:19-20, RSV)

The one thing that is going to matter in the end is what words we hear from the mouth of our Lord Christ Jesus the day we meet Him. Will it be “I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.” (Matthew 7:23, RSV) or “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25:21, RSV)? Have you been faithful over little? Are you living your life for Jesus? Is He at the center of your life?

And he said to all, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny

himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.' (Luke 9:23,  
RSV)

I know that I have not always truly, deeply, sincerely believed in Christ Jesus. Up until my junior year at Hillcrest, I claimed Christianity as my belief but I was never willing to take up my cross and follow Him with everything I was. Finally, I realized that I was in desperate need of a Savior to save me from the punishment of Hell that my sins deserved, and that I needed to take my faith completely seriously if I said I believed Him at all. My prayer is that your life and my life is and will be 100% committed to Jesus Christ.

I'd like to close with a story of a seventeen-year-old teenager who has, I think, been one of the greatest successes of the century. Her name is Cassie Bernall. I'm sure many of you have heard her story. She was one of the 15 killed in Columbine High School, Littleton, Colorado. Her last words before she was shot were, "Yes, I believe in God." She was martyred for her faith. Less than a week before she was killed, she had written this poem. No one else I know has described true success so well.

Now I have given up on everything else  
I have found it to be the only way  
To really know Christ and to experience  
The mighty power that brought  
Him back to life again, and to find  
Out what it means to suffer and to  
Die with Him. So, whatever it takes  
I will be one who lives in the fresh  
Newness of life of those who are  
Alive from the dead.