



ST STITHIANS COLLEGE

Guest Speaker's Address, Founders' Day 2 June 2018

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Greetings.....

Wow, what a beautiful day to be right here, right now at these beautiful grounds of St Stithians with all you beautiful people. An honour and a privilege indeed.

This beautiful moment has been in the making for the past 34 years for me.

Yes, it was 34 years ago when I attended my first Founders' Day celebration, to give thanks to our Founders, to celebrate our present and to embrace our future as a Proudly South Africa school - Inspiring Excellence and making a world of a difference.

Back then in '84, I was a mere 13 years old, excited about being a teenager, skinny legged with a beautiful Afro and full of hormones.

I was in awe of the great men and women who stood in front of us as Guest speakers of the School, and always wondered what it will take to be one of them.

As my imagination wondered over the years, I thought maybe I would have to be President of the country, addressing the geo-political issues of the globe, or inspiring hope to my people by addressing issues of corruption, break down in governance, racial polarity and unemployment and galvanizing them to put their differences aside and together focus their energies and God given talents in building a better South Africa for all. I'll probably inspire them with a song by one of the countries legends and say THUMA MINA.

Maybe I would have to a religious leader and remind the congregation gathered about the key to a better life;

Buddhism - Hurt not others with that which pains yourself

Christianity - Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

Hinduism - Treat others as you would yourself be treated

Islam - Do unto all men as you would wish to be done unto you

Judaism - What you yourself hate, do to no man

Sacred Earth - Do as you will, as long as you harm no one

Maybe I would have to win a Grammy award for my cultural genius and I could use the opportunity to thank my parents for giving me the gift of life, nurturing me, teaching me, dressing me up, fighting for me, kissing and hugging me, and most importantly, loving me unconditionally.

Maybe I would have to be a sportsman, having achieved greatness in my field representing my country. What would I say? Maybe something along these lines;

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong men stumbles, or how the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust, and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming, but who actually strives to do the deeds, who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy course, who at best knows in the end, the triumph of high achievement, or the bitterness of defeat.

Wait, that sounds like a Saints Headmaster...

Or in this era of moral decay, lack of accountability and unethical behaviour that is putting in question the trust we place on our corporates as citizens, maybe I would be like Shell who announced yesterday a new dawn at the company, a new Programme that leverages the power of truth and reconciliation about their past, to build a sustainable future.

An accountability on the public commitments made on the environment and human rights. A genuine change to the way they do business.

To do what is right, first they had to admit to what was wrong. This announcement was made in the Hague and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission process was referenced as their inspiration. They term this, the 'I'm sorry campaign". Powerful stuff, and this is what I call Leadership (and something most students and men would be used to).

Like I said, I had an active imagination in my teenage years. Reality is that Saints leadership, in its own wisdom, has chosen me to address this auspicious occasion and I haven't achieved any of those accolades...yet!

So, for inspiration I thought about the Saints Honour Code - Honour God, Honour Others and Honour Self. A code that defines a character of knowing myself, being myself and making my contribution. So, let's do that.

I joined the Saints family in 1983. It was an era of defiance and having the courage of one's conviction. Saints leadership, under Mark Henning, had courageously decided, a year or two earlier, to defy the system and allow a group of black boys to attend the prestigious St Stithians college. I can only imagine what the pavilion chat prior to the Founders' Day service must have been like in 1981 when I think this decision was made.

So, I represent the Saints experiment of the 80's or as I would like to look at it, the pioneering group of brave young boys and their parents that were thrown into the deep end, taken out of their comfort zones and knowns, into the big unknown of St Stithians College. It was extremely courageous of leadership at the time, but then again, to transform the world, takes courage.

I was not born into privileged, but it came into being, through the privilege of being given an opportunity to attend this prestigious school with all that it stands for. I came to Saints on an academic scholarship.

My parents were black middle class, meaning they both did an honest job, my dad as an electrician for City Power and my Mom, a nurse for Baragwanath hospital, so both civil servants, not CEO's, Land and Asset owners, which was common place for majority of the parents of the College at the time.

My scholarship was a result of a man, an ex-Grey High School Headmaster in Port Elizabeth, Mr Stan Edkins, who upon retirement was inspired by proving that a black child, given the same access and opportunities as a white child, the result will be the same. That was the birth of what we today call SSP.

Reflecting on my journey since 1984 till today, I dare say, my guardian angel, the late Stan Edkins, has unfortunately been proven wrong. The experiment failed, as for me, it did not achieve the outcome hypothesized, the experiment actually proved that a black child given the same access and opportunity as a white child, the result was not equal but better. Proof being that I am the only one today from the class of 1987 that is actually addressing you today. Yes, I am actually aware that 1984 was not the right starting base either, as the class of 1987 already had a 13 year head start on me when I joined Saints.

But today being Founders' Day, let me focus my energies on sharing with you how my course in life was set as a result of my ship once being anchored here.

Saints identified the Leader in me.

In 1984 I was the proud captain of the U13F Rugby team, yes, the u13F's. What great memories. I showed improvement, subsequently leading the U14D and U15C teams until my rugby career sadly ended when we played that horrible Afrikaans school, Monument. I was picked on, targeted and seriously 'klapped' in that game that I had to choose my handsome good looks over a career of abuse, even at the expense of glory.

I was also chosen by my peers as their SRC representatives in Standard 7. Guess they were recognizing the activist in me. I continued to serve for the rest of my subsequent years at school including being elected a Prefect in matric, first black to be appointed in the history of the school at that time.

Saints taught me to embrace diversity.

Today I know that white people are not being racist when they say that all black people look the same. Coming from Soweto into Mount Stephens, to be honest, for the first month or so, I thought all the boys looked the same. It took me a while to realize that heights are different, the colour of their eyes, their hair, the different haircuts and shape of faces. I was equally intrigued why everyone called each other by their surname, so till today I realize that some of the old boys I still only know by their surnames and name introductions only taking place post school.

I had the privilege of visiting some of the boys at their homes for the weekend. Now this changed my world completely. These people that I had only encountered on TV before attending Saints, now being in their home, really broke all truths I held up until then. To realize that they eat like me, sleep like me, laugh and smile like me, get angry like me, have dreams and aspirations like me, have fears and anxieties like me, wow, that changed my world. It demystified and allowed me to SEE and HEAR people for the individuals and characters they are. It taught me to be tolerant and non-judgmental.

Saints taught me brotherhood.

I remember when a dear friend of mine, fellow prefect and Head of Mt Stephens, Dirk Parsons passed away in the US a few years post school. The class of 1987 was moved to action. We found each other wherever we were in the world, mobilized and galvanized around a common mission of bringing Dirk home. To experience such brotherhood was moving for me. Put meaning into One and All.

I guess I have some fond memories of my time here at Saints. It was not all perfect and on hindsight wished I had received the following advice at my induction or better still, wish their words were inscribed in the prefects exam of the time.

So, my advice to any boy or girl attending Saints for the same time will be as follows;

Some kids will be smarter than you, some kids will have cooler clothes than you, some kids will be better at sports than you. IT DOESN'T MATTER.

You have your thing too. Be the kid who can get along. Be the kid who is generous. Be the kid who is who is happy for others. Be the kid who DOES THE RIGHT THING. Be the nice kid.

So, to conclude, what I have learned the most in life is courage, courage to live my truth and courage to be in my power. I have learned to take accountability and ownership of the gift of life that God has given me.

I have learned the courage to take ownership for the choices I make.

I, therefore Choose;

To live by choice, not by chance.

To make changes, not excuses.

To be motivated, not manipulated.

To be useful, not used.

To excel, not to compete.

I choose self-esteem, not self-pity.

I choose to listen to my inner voice, not the random opinion of others.

I chose to Honour God, Honour Others and Honour Self.

I thank You.....
