

Commencement 2019

- *May 18, 2019*
- *Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.*

Good morning and welcome to your commencement from the Seattle University School of Law, held here in the opera house. You may think it is quite fitting that you are finishing up in a place for operas in light of what some of the arias of your years of law studies have been like in their operatic qualities, sometimes events of joy, perhaps more often what may have felt like the last sung notes before collapsing. You've made it and you will fittingly be coming up to the operatic stage to receive your diploma and to take a bow.

The last time I spoke here in the Susan Brotman Auditorium was at the memorial service for Susan's husband, Jeff Brotman, the co-founder and Chairman of Costco. Susan asked me to speak as a bookend to the Rabbi who started the service. I am a good bookend—which is pretty much what I am doing today—before the student and faculty member you really want to listen to and the presentation of degrees you even more eagerly want.

Speaking of bookends—watch this segue—I love coming to the Law School Commencements because it is here I learn what books I should be reading. One year two speakers mentioned Bryan Stevenson's Just Mercy, perhaps one of the best books I've read the last ten years. And what a delight to hear Anthony Ray Hinton this semester in Sullivan Hall, an innocent African-American man freed from decades of imprisonment on death row, because of Bryan Stevenson. I listened to Mr. Hinton telling you just how important for the very lives of others are your law studies, especially in assuring just representation for all persons before the law.

I love asking people, "What are you reading?" I'd guess that if I asked you, "What are you reading?" you'd say nothing but law books, law cases and precedents, and soon bar pass preparation texts. Believe that there will come a day when you will be able to do reading for pleasure, for interest, for information, for fun! When you do, please read two books.

Read David Brooks' The Second Mountain. The Quest for a Moral Life. You will want to read it to reflect on what is the ultimate goal of all of your accomplishments in your careers, the goal of kinship which will surprise you with joy. As someone else says, "All service is but the hallway leading to the ballroom of kinship." May your service in the law lead to the ballroom of the joy of that kinship.

And read Melinda Gates' The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World. It is a book about the places in the world we do not go—and just as importantly to the places of the world where we do go, work and live—where women, given the chance, medical help, family planning, education, equality of partnership, are empowered to change the world. It is also a book about the life, and marriage, and work, faith, and equal partnership with Bill, and the deepest views of Melinda herself. At the very end of her book, in the epilogue, she comes to the same conclusion as does David Brooks. She writes:

"I've been saying from the beginning of this book that equality can empower women, and empowered women will change the world. But in the end, I have to confess that, for me,

equality is a milestone; it is not the summit. The supreme goal for humanity is not equality but connection.”

She doesn't use the word “kinship”, she says “connection”, but she and David Brooks make the same point of where all our efforts lead.

I hope you feel kinship and connection today at your commencement with your classmates, with your faculty whom you can now love(!), and with your family and friends, who do love you. And may all you do in “a life in the law in the service of justice” lead you to kinship and connection, ...and the joy that is found in them. I look forward to greeting you on this operatic stage.