

Founders Day 2008 Address by Rev. Bradford C. Mercer

In 1917, a young British man, who would one day become a world famous writer, found himself serving with the Somerset Light Infantry in the Great War in France. He hit the front lines on his nineteenth birthday.

He was an eyewitness to the brutal trench warfare that characterized World War I. During his time in France he contracted trench fever; he was hit by shrapnel in the left hand, left leg and under the left arm; and he lost many close friends and schoolmates. He even accidentally captured a group of German soldiers.

Between the two World Wars this young man, C.S. Lewis, became a tutor at University College and was later elected a Fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford. But more importantly, he was converted to Jesus Christ.

On the evening of October 22, 1939, Oxford undergraduates packed into the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin hoping for words of comfort and encouragement. Recently, war had been declared on Germany, and an ominous cloud of unrest and fear covered Oxford. It was hoped that Lewis, an ex-soldier and committed Christian, could help put the crisis into perspective. As the sun withdrew and the stained glass windows grew dark inside St. Mary's, Lewis climbed the stairs to the elevated pulpit and said,

A *university* is a society for the pursuit of learning. As students, you will be expected to make yourselves, or to start making yourselves . . . into philosophers, scientists, scholars, critics or historians. And at first sight this seems to be an odd thing to do during a great war. What is the use of beginning a task which we have so little chance of finishing? Or, even if we ourselves should happen not to be interrupted by death or military service, why should we—indeed, how can we—continue to take an interest in these placid occupations when the lives of our friends and the liberties of Europe are in the balance? Is it not like fiddling while Rome burns?

He continued,

I think it important to try to see the present calamity in a true perspective. The war creates no absolutely new situation; it simply aggravates the permanent human situation so that we can no longer ignore it. Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice. Human culture has always had to exist under the shadow of something infinitely more important than itself. If men had postponed the search for knowledge and beauty until they were secure, the search would never have begun. We are mistaken when we compare war with "normal life." Life has never been normal.

Do you remember where you were on September 11, 2001? I remember receiving a call from my mother on that terrible day. She just wanted to talk. Like so many members of so many families throughout our nation, she just wanted to hear the voice of a family member.

I told her that I had just finished reading Lewis's address, now entitled "Learning in War-time," and I was deeply moved. September 11 brought home to us all the precariousness and uncertainty of life.

Not long ago, I was sitting where you are sitting. I remember our first visit to Chamberlain-Hunt Academy, meeting administrators and teachers, touring the campus. What do I remember most about that first visit? Testosterone! *Men* training *men*.

My son, Harrison, was a Cadet at Chamberlain-Hunt Academy for years. These were not always easy years. I remember Harrison's words: "Okay Dad, I've learned a lot at Chamberlain-Hunt. I'm ready to come home." And that was after just three days! As I said, he was here for years. Cindy and I remember the letters, report cards, conversations with teachers and administrators, the athletic activities and the opportunities to visit.

I also remember the day, later, when Harrison said to me, "Dad, I don't know where I'd be without Chamberlain-Hunt." To this day, when Harrison needs to make an important decision, one of his first calls is to Colonel Blanton.

Harrison now serves in the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team stationed in Vicenza, Italy. He loves jumping out of airplanes and helicopters only to be surrounded by bad people. He obviously takes after his mother! Cindy and I witnessed Harrison's final jump and attended his graduation at Fort Benning, Georgia. We walked with him through military security at the Atlanta airport. We waved goodbye as he boarded the flight for Italy.

Recently, the Ruling Elders at our church laid hands upon, and prayed for, a young man who was going off to boot camp with the Marine Corps. We prayed for the family. We waved goodbye—again.

In "Learning in War-time," Lewis stressed the importance of 1 Cor. 10:31 (NASB): "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." He emphasized three points of application: (1) remember the past, (2) live faithfully in the present and (3) trust God with the future.

First, *remember the past*:

Not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future and yet need something to set against the present, to remind us that the basic assumptions have been quite different in different periods and that much which seems certain to the educated is merely temporary fashion. A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village; the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age.

Second, *live faithfully in the present*:

Never, in peace or war, commit your virtue or your happiness to the future. Happy work is best done by the man who takes his long-term plans somewhat lightly and works from moment to moment 'as to the Lord.' It is only our daily bread that we are encouraged to ask for. The present is the only time in which any duty can be done or any grace received.

Third, *trust God with the future*:

Yet war does do something to death. It forces us to remember it. The only reason why the cancer at sixty or the paralysis at seventy-five do not bother us is that we forget them. War makes death real to us, and that would have been regarded as one of its blessings by most of the great Christians of the past. They thought it good for us to be always aware of our mortality. I am inclined to think they were right. All the life in us, all schemes of happiness that centered in this world, were always doomed to a final frustration.

We see unmistakably the sort of universe in which we have all along been living, and must come to terms with it. If we had foolish un-Christian hopes about human culture, they are now shattered. If we thought we were building up a heaven on earth, if we looked for something that would turn the present world from a place of pilgrimage into a permanent city satisfying the soul of man, we are disillusioned, and not a moment too soon.

I'll leave you with this: General Omar Nelson Bradley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, addressed an Armistice Day Luncheon of the Boston Chamber of Commerce on November 10, 1948. His words were profound and prophetic. Here is an excerpt:

We have too many men of science; too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. Man is stumbling blindly through spiritual darkness while toying with the precarious secrets of life and death. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants.

Chamberlain-Hunt Academy is far from perfect. But the men who lead this institution don't equivocate about their calling and commitment. They seek to mold men of strength, character and integrity—in very uncertain times.

May God continue to use this place in the service of Jesus Christ, our nation and our world!

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From the president's desk . . .

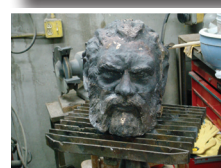
Bronze casting is an ordeal of sorts, at least for the novice. I am sure for professionals, all the details and dangers are second nature. For someone just starting out, however, there is an uneasy mix of waiting and urgency and the unknown. As a sculpting student at Mississippi College, I have had opportunities to assist other students cast their work. Last year, with the help of a few Cadets, I cast my first piece: The Head of Samuel Mason.

For those unfamiliar with the processes, let me briefly describe it: First, create the piece to be cast. I sculpted Mason's head in wax (and made a rubber mold of the original *just in case*). Second, make a plaster mold of the wax sculpture and melt out the wax, leaving the void into which you will pour molten bronze. Third, when all the moisture has been evaporated from the plaster, melt bronze in the furnace. Slag the impurities and *carefully* pour the bronze into the plaster mold. Fourth, when the bronze is cool, break open the plaster mold. Fifth, clean up the bronze casting by cutting off vents and grinding sprues (waste material from the molding process). Sixth, sandblast, rinse off and patina, and *voila!* A successful bronze casting.

Actually, my first casting was not successful. I had not followed the directions closely and missed an important detail: the void in the plaster mold is supposed to be only about 1/4 inch thick, and in some places I had left it at least 2 inches thick. Because of this, I ran out of bronze during pouring; by the time I melted more bronze, the previously poured bronze had cooled and did not fuse with the second pouring. I wound up with Mason's head in halves. Here's where the insurance of the *just in case* rubber mold came in handy! With that mold, I recreated the wax sculpture and started the process again. The second time, five months later, success!

While I am not advocating failure, I can attest there are things to be learned in the process. Some educational philosophies want to remove failure as an option, thereby creating an alternate reality. The "Everyone's a Winner" philosophy denies the reality that actions have consequences. In the *real* world, not following directions has negative consequences and someone winds up paying. Because I did not follow directions closely in the first casting, I used twice as much bronze as I should have. Someone had to pay for my mistake: either I could have kept the first, flawed casting (which used twice the necessary bronze, thereby shorting someone else in the bronze supply), or I could have gone to all the time and trouble to recast the sculpture (i.e., do it correctly) and made the "extra" bronze available to someone else for another project. *Someone* was going to have to pay for my mistake.

That *someone* was me. Frankly, it was an easy choice because I wanted to learn how to cast a bronze sculpture from start to finish, and now, a full year later with the project finally finished and installed, I know. The Cadets who worked with me may not be conscious of the lesson because, well, it wasn't *their* mistake and they enjoyed melting bronze and taking a sledge hammer to plaster—the more times, the better. Still, I hope somewhere in their brain the lesson is imprinted: Actions have consequences.



Cadet LIFE

Mason Wants His Head, and We've Got It



When the moon is full and the temperature and humidity just right, listen: you can hear the *clipty-clopty* of his horse's hooves as Samuel Mason searches the Trace for his head—and the men who took it from him. . . . Such has been the tale told to countless campers around crackling campfires near the Natchez Trace, perhaps since 1803, when Samuel Mason lost his head.

Sadly, Mason, from distinguished Virginia stock and formerly a captain in the Continental Army and commander of Ft. Henry in present-day West Virginia, turned to a life of crime after killing the man with whom his daughter eloped. For a time, he operated as a pirate on the Mississippi River before terrorizing travelers on the Natchez Trace. By 1800, Mason had become one of the most notorious bandits on the American frontier. In 1803, Spanish authorities captured Mason and some of his gang, but before they could turn them over to American authorities, Mason escaped.

Determined to put an end to Mason's terror, American authorities offered a \$2,000 reward (about \$64,165 in today's value) for his capture, *dead or alive*. Ironically, the reward was so great that it was two of Mason's own gang members who claimed it. In July 1803, by the campfire, they killed Mason and cut off his head. Pretending to be heroes, the two took Mason's head to Greenville, Mississippi—the old county seat of Jefferson County, about halfway between Port Gibson and Natchez—to claim the reward.

The further irony is that the bounty was so high that there was not enough gold in Greenville to pay it off. While waiting for the gold to arrive, the two "heroes" were identified by a Trace traveler as members of Mason's gang, because they had attacked and robbed him not many days earlier. The two men were thus arrested and hanged.

As the story goes, authorities put Mason's head on a pike on the edge of town as a warning to others who might be tempted to follow in his footsteps.

On 11 November 2008, Samuel Mason's head was posted at Chamberlain-Hunt. Well, not his *actual* head, but a bronze sculpture created by COL West in his sculpting class at Mississippi College. Last year, COL West sculpted Mason's head in wax and created a plaster mold of the wax original. With the help of several Cadets, he then poured molten bronze into the plaster mold, broke the mold and cleaned up the bronze head. It was a long process, and one not without its hiccups. At last, however, the project was completed and The Head was ready for its post.

Why Mason's head? And, why post it at Chamberlain-Hunt? Aside from the local history (and legend) that The Head represents, it serves as a warning. It is a colorful reminder that actions have consequences, that choices matter. In a fit of passion, Samuel Mason gave up a respectable family and military career in exchange for a life in the mosquito-infested swamps along the Trace with a gang of thieves, who like he, were ruled by selfish passions. Despite their shared experiences (unlawful as they were), their greed overruled their commitment to their leader.

A year or more at Chamberlain-Hunt interrupts a boy's life. It takes him away from family, friends, routines, surroundings that—for good or ill—are comfortable to him. Being removed from his "comfort zone" allows a boy to become aware of his impulses and to become more intentional about his choices. When he leaves Chamberlain-Hunt, he has a different perspective by which to judge his own actions and the company he keeps. Every time a Cadet's poor choice prompts a leader's command to "run to the road" (a trip from the DFAC door to The Head and back) and he slaps Mason's head, he imprints the image and the story on his mind. Do not underestimate the power of image and legend to shape a boy's thinking!



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CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Fall 2008 / Spring 2009

December 14	Phone Calls
December 16-18	Nine Weeks Exams
Dec 19-Jan 8	Christmas Break
February 8	Phone Calls
Feb 13-Feb 23	Winter Break
March 11-13	Nine Weeks Exams
March 16-20	Crusader Challenge
March 29	Phone Calls
Apr 3-Apr 13	Spring Break
May 17	Sports Banquet/Phone Calls
May 18-21	Final Exams
May 21	Baccalaureate/Senior Speeches
May 22	Final Pass in Review