

Arthur Lovington Atwood Hammond Holds Community Baccalaureate Service

The ALAH high school Class of 2023 were invited to the annual Community Baccalaureate Service held in the west gymnasium of the high school on Sunday, May 21.

Mr. Stephen McClarey played as the graduating class entered the gym. Arthur United Methodist Pastor Jill Bunker gave the greeting. Sisters & Company then led the audience in worship songs.

Misty Appleby then gave the message for the service. Her message was titled: My prayer for you.... Misty began by saying "Good evening and welcome to the Class of 2023 Baccalaureate ceremony.

If you don't know me, my name is Misty Appleby and I live in Atwood. Many of you know me as the high school cheerleading coach, or as Molly's mom... or Ryan, or Mitiku, or Katie's mom. I was actually a substitute teacher for almost all of you in the 5th and 6th grades.... Some of you know me as a Sunday school teacher, or as one of the youth leaders at the First Baptist Church in Atwood. Maybe you have been on a youth group trip with us to go float down a river or just played a game of ping pong with me. I have had the privilege of watching many of you grow and develop as children into some of the most amazing young adults. I am in awe when I look at you and the things you have already accomplished. I have seen the pain some of you have endured and overcome. Some of you have lost parents, or siblings. Some of you have fought private battles that no one knows about. Ava even lost the ability to walk in grade school and we got to see God give her the ability to walk again. After seeing all that you have been through, I cannot imagine what your future will look like. Some of you will be going into the workforce. Some will go to college, some to trade schools, and some of you have absolutely no idea of what you are going to do in the future... and that's ok. In 1997, when I was your age, I sat in that chair at Sesser-Valier High School saying that in three short months, I was heading to Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri. My school was paid for, scholarships accepted, roommate chosen. Do you know how much time I spent at SWBU? Exactly zero days, other than the day I visited campus. God had other plans for me and I ended up in Tennessee three months after I graduated from high school. That came completely out of left field. I wasn't expecting it at all. I have good news for you. Sometimes our plans change, and that's ok! Trust God as He guides you and He will establish your path. When Pastor Jill reached out to me a few weeks ago and asked me to speak at this year's Baccalaureate service, I was surprised, and so humbled that I was asked. I am not a pastor. I don't have a degree in religion. I haven't been to seminary. However, I do love the Lord and I am so excited for this opportunity to share some words with you. I began to reflect and think about what I wish someone had told the 18 year old Misty, the week before she graduated high school. I actually remember sitting in a Baccalaureate service and singing a song... something about soaring like an Eagle. I don't have any idea what the message was about or who the speaker was. I'm sure it was good. I'm sure it was full of hope and future and becoming who we were meant to be. After all, isn't that what this is about... telling you all to go out and be who God made you to be? Well, it is. That is absolutely the purpose of what we are doing here tonight. But I would be remiss if I didn't share a few other things with you. As we sit here together this evening, I want to talk to you quickly about the three things I wish someone had shared with me. 1. God's grace for your past. 2. God's blessing for the present. 3. God's blessings for your future.

I also want to share my prayer for you "The Past"... Let's talk about the past. You have accomplished so much. You have worked hard, studied long hours, put so much effort into class projects, comforted friends, had so many laughs, and enjoyed the moments together. Homecomings, float building, marching band competitions, volleyball championships, conference titles and victories won. Your senior trip... which looked amazing! Prom and a million other things you've been blessed to be a part of. These are the things we WANT to remember. Don't lose sight of these beautiful memories you've made.

Unfortunately, sometimes in high school, we do things we'd rather not remember. Wouldn't it be nice to say that you made it through all 4,745 days of the last 13 years without making a mistake? Maybe you've been a bully. Maybe you hate being here and everyone knows it. It could be that you made some absolutely terrible choices in the past and did a lot of really stupid things. Maybe everyone thinks you're perfect but you have hidden secrets that no one knows about. Perfect Snapchat and Instagram posts? Probably not. The most wonderful thing that I can ever share with you is that God has grace for your past. 1 John 1:9 says that if we confess our sins, HE is faithful and just to forgive our sins. The good news is that this does not rely on you or me doing anything other than confessing to the Lord. HE does the rest and HE forgives. I hope that you walk out of this place today, knowing that regardless of anything you have ever done, God's grace is perfect and He will forgive you. In Hebrews 8:12 God says "I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sins no more." God's grace for your past is perfect and more than enough. Stop holding on to the past. Stop being defined by what you did and how you did things. Your mistakes are not who you are. All of our experiences in life do shape us and mold us, but we are not to be defined by our past. Remember the good things and let go of the bad. It's time to step into the present. The here and now. The PRESENT is what we are experiencing as we speak. It is today, this moment. As humans, we are often consumed by past decisions, thinking that we could have done something differently. Sometimes we are consumed by the future. What is going to happen? What will I do? Will I become a teacher, or a welder, or will I become a Social Worker? I want to ask you for this very moment to stop thinking about the past and stop thinking about the future. I want to tell you why.

GOD, in HIS perfect wisdom, could have placed you in ANY location, at ANY time in the history or future of the universe, in ANY school or ANY situation. You literally could have been born in 500BC in China or in Egypt. Yet in His sovereignty, God chose to place you HERE, at this time, at this moment, in this place. God knew that you would be sitting here in this gymnasium with me tonight. There is a reason for that.

GOD's perfect wisdom placed you here at this time with each other for a purpose.

Seniors, look around you. Right now. Look at the people sitting next to you. Now look into the crowd. You have parents, teachers, family members here to support you. God put you here with these people, right now. This is the present. Regardless of what anyone else is thinking right now, I want you to know that GOD OFFERS PEACE for the present. This moment and this day. Every day is a gift. Every day you have to wake up with intentionality. It is so easy for us to wallow in the past and worry about the future. Each day for the rest of your life, you have to choose to wake up and thank God for



Misty Appleby gave the message at the Baccalaureate service at ALAH High School last Sunday, May 21. She did an amazing job and related very well to the Class of 2023 as her daughter, Molly is a member of the class.



Arthur United Methodist Church Pastor Jill Bunker gave the greeting and sending words at the beginning and end of the 2023 Arthur Lovington Atwood Hammond Community Baccalaureate Service that was held in the west gym of the high school on Sunday, May 21.



These seniors attended the Baccalaureate Service held at the high school last Sunday. The members of the entire class were introduced and the audience members were given the opportunity to congratulate them and extend their blessing following the service.

this day that He has allowed you to live. Every day I talk to a lot of people. They'll ask me how I'm doing, and my answer is always, "I'm great! I'm alive today, living and breathing so there must be a reason I'm here!" THIS IS TRUTH for me and for you. And this is true in GOD'S WORD. He tells us not to worry about the past and not to worry about the future. We need to live today, doing what we can to love and encourage each other. Each day, for the rest of your life, get up, and focus on God and the peace that HE wants to bring to your life, right where you are at. Ask Him what HE wants for you and live each day for Him. "God's blessings your future"... This might be my favorite part. When I was 18, someone gave me a graduation card and there was a Bible verse on it. It became the theme for my life. From that day on, it's always been my favorite verse. Now by nature, I, like many of you, am a worrier. I am always worried about what is going to happen and if things will all come together. I like things to go well and as planned.

Unfortunately, life is like a box of chocolates. They might give you diabetes and they could make your dog really sick. See, you thought you knew what I was going to say there.... It wasn't what you were expecting, but it is very true. The truth is that we have no idea what will happen in the future. It could be one thing and it could be another. When I feel hopeless, lost, or confused, I am always reminded that I don't have to be worried. When life doesn't go as planned, what is the benefit of worrying? That card that I was given at my graduation party had a verse on it from Jeremiah 29:11, and it said... "For I know the plans I have for you. To prosper you, and not to harm you, to give you a FUTURE and a HOPE!"

It does not say, you know the plans you're making for yourself and it's going to be bright! It does not say in the Bible that if you manifest great things, that

great things will happen. It says GOD knows the plans He has for you and God's plans are to prosper you. God's plans are not to harm you. God's plans are for you to have a future and HOPE in Him. In Jeremiah 29, it goes on to say, "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with your whole heart." Class of 2023, please seek Him with your whole heart. Please focus on Jesus. He has a perfect plan for you and it is to give you a future and a hope.

I want to leave you today with these words from one of my favorite authors named Francis Chan. He says "Do you know that nothing you do in this life will ever matter, unless it is about loving God and loving the people that He has made?" You see, life isn't about our successes and failures. Life isn't about what we can accomplish. Life is about what we can do to show God's love to the people around us. Not only students, but people ALL OVER THE WORLD are missing this. We get so consumed with life and all that is in it, that we forget to love God and love people. THOSE are the things that count. In closing today, I want to share something with

you. Unbeknownst to many of you, I have been praying for a lot of you since the day I met you, or first heard about you. As a matter of fact, from the first day my children entered public school, I began praying for their teachers and classmates. So today, I want to close with my prayer for you.

To the Class of 2023: If you don't know Jesus, I hope and pray that you find Him. If you find Him, I pray that you serve Him and honor Him all the days of your life. If you live your life for Him, I pray that you remember that even on the hardest days, He is there. He did not say it would be easy, but He said He would never leave you or forsake you. I pray that in all you do, you follow God. That you seek His direction and His will for your life. I pray that as you grow up, go to work, go through college, start your own families, and lay down roots somewhere, that you will remember how much you were loved by your families, teachers, administrators, and this community. I especially hope and pray that you remember that you are LOVED by the Creator of the Universe. He spoke the universe into existence and He felt like the world needed you! He is the one who knew you

before you were conceived. The one who gave His son to pay for your sins. I pray that on the hardest days you will lean on Him. I pray that when you are wronged, you forgive. I pray that on your best days, you thank Him. I sincerely pray that that God blesses you tremendously.

I'll close with this verse, which is another of my favorites from Proverbs 3. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths." Class of 2023, this is my prayer for you".

Pastor Jill Bunker gave thanks to the committee and to Sisters & Company and Mr. Stephen McClarey who provided music for the professional and recessional. Student Baccalaureate Committee members were Layla Deel, Maggie Benedict, Emmalee Nall, Alisha Frederick, Kailee Otto, Charley Condill, Abigail Miller, Brooklyn Gingerich, Ashley Seegmiller, Aaron Seegmiller, Nolan Schrock, Kendall Burdick, Kaylee Schrock, Mitiku Appleby and Mackenzie Condill served on the 2023 Student Baccalaureate Committee that helped to plan and organize the service.



Sisters & Company led the worship songs at the Community Baccalaureate Service on Sunday, May 21. They performed four songs during different portions of the service and did a wonderful job.