

Well, good morning. Very, very good to have a full house this morning. As was already said, welcome to all of you returning students, new students. It's great to have the faculty up here as well and appreciate the respect that you as students show to them. We also have our staff in the house this morning, most of them gathered in the back to make room for you. So, we want to recognize them, all those who serve on the staff at the university as well. We want to say thank you to you as we thank the Lord for you and your service here.

Today we begin a new academic year, and as Dr. Porcella said, a new year brings new opportunities, new challenges, new blessings, new successes, new needs for you to be dependent upon the Lord's grace. There are new folks in our midst, both in the student body and on the faculty and staff. There are new initiatives that have been undertaken. There's even a new security booth near the door. Lots of new things this year, but it's altogether entirely fitting that we begin this convocation focused on our verse for the year, which comes to us from the passage Sam read in Ephesians chapter 2, because it is very much about our newness in Christ, and what we are to do with that.

This year, we have selected for our focus throughout the year that closing verse of the passage that was read, verse 10. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

If you're a returning student here, you know how important the concept of walking is to us. You have come to this institution to walk a different path, and that's not a tagline that we arrived at arbitrarily. It's connected very much to our Christian beliefs. It's drawn from tens of verses in the Bible that reference the way we are to live, the way we are to walk, including some in this letter from the Apostle Paul in Ephesians. The exhortations that follow chapter 2 about the way in which we are to walk are many and profound. They tell us not just the posture that we are to have during our Christian lives, during our walk, but also the manner in which we are to carry it out, the path that we are to choose. It is a very robust picture of the Christian life, that we are to walk worthy of the Lord. Wise, in love, together, with humility and gentleness and patience.

And this passage in chapter 2, verse 10 concludes that way. We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. We have work to do, to do the good works that we were created for before all existed. We were created to do these good works. We are to walk in them. That is, we are to do them perpetually. They are to be part of our lifestyle. It's not just an action that we take up at any given point in time. It is rather to be our posture and our lifestyle. We are to live this way, carrying out these good works which we were created for.

This passage we'll spend time picking through throughout the entire year, emphasizing it, drawing from it, calling your attention to it. And this morning, I want us to do just that. The Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says we are His workmanship. That word workmanship is a robust one. It's very easy for us to think it's just something God put together. It's a machine that He made for us to then go out and do works, as though God assembled a machine and then said, here you are, you're a machine, go do good works. That would be to miss something really powerful here. This word for workmanship is the word from which we draw the word poesis or poetry or poem. We are, by God's grace, in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ, His poetry, His handcrafted works of art, not a tool to be used in this world, but His very voice to communicate His intention and His purpose for humanity in this world. We are His workmanship. We are His poetry, His craftsmanship, His handcrafted works of art. You should take a little time to get your mind around that.

This passage isn't telling us what we should do to earn our salvation. It is telling us how we are to conduct ourselves, to deport ourselves, and to live in light of the salvation that we have received from God.

The emphasis here that we are saved by grace through faith is driven several times in these passages that were read for us. Paul is reminding us we are, in fact, objects of His grace. We didn't do anything to earn His salvation— this salvation. And we don't do anything after it to prove that we were worthy of it. Rather, we recognize that we have been made new by the Lord God. And we should reflect that

newness in the way we think and the way we live. We are His workmanship, His handcrafted works of art. Created in Christ Jesus. There is nothing, nothing for us apart from Christ.

I reminded the new students and transfer students at the end of last week the importance of having our eyes fixed upon Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Brothers and sisters, we start a new academic year not at a college or university alone, but at a place that holds at the center of everything we do The holy, authoritative, sufficient Word of God and the person and work of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. And that should preoccupy your thoughts and your mind and your actions and your deeds and your duties and your community every day that you are here because we have been made new in and through Christ Jesus.

We are His craftsmanship. We are His handcrafted works of art created in Christ for good works to live that out In this world, for one another and in the world, to actually be demonstrations of God's grace, His intentions, His glory, His purposes, not our own. In that way, we are trophies of His grace.

We're not tools in His toolbox. He doesn't need us. He chooses us, and by His grace, we become trophies of His grace.

In fact, the apostle says this, He raised us up and seated us in heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. What God is doing is bringing glory to Himself. We've been saved by grace through faith. Not of works that any of us should boast. It's a gift that comes from God. And it isn't something that we wear on our sleeve. It's something that God does in putting on display before the whole world down through the ages and the fallen angels included. We are trophies of His grace. God redeems us who were dead, makes us alive to live for Him. And in so doing, we are trophies of His grace. Try to get your mind around that one. You were not created in this for your own purposes, but for His purposes, that He might be glorified, that He might be praised, that His grace would be known throughout all time. It's not about us. Even in this passage, we don't boast that we are His workmanship. We actually just enjoy the fact That we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand.

Every year in Convocation, I say this to you. If you're sitting here today wondering how you got here or why you're here, you should put that out of your mind. We repeat and echo the words of God's servant Job who said without equivocation, nothing can thwart the purposes of God. You are here by God's design.

Amen.

God carries out His purposes. They cannot be thwarted. And here we see in this passage that we've been created for these good works prepared beforehand for us to walk in. You are not Choosing to walk in God's works, choosing to walk in the good works that God created for you. If you don't do it, you're choosing not to do something He's already designed for you. You are simply resisting and rebelling the will of God, which is to walk in these good works for which you have been created as His handcrafted works of art, His poetry, His trophy of grace. You don't choose to do that. You choose not to do that.

If you think about the academic year that is in front of us, I would remind you that because you have come to this place to study in this way with these men and women, to be served by those men and women in this community that upholds the centrality of God's Word and the person and work of Jesus Christ, we will not stop praying that your will is yielded to his. That His way will be accomplished in your lives, that whatever you are struggling with spiritually, whether it is indifference or apathy or outright rebellion where you are fleeing the will and purposes of God and the good news of Jesus, we pray that His Spirit would relentlessly pursue you and bring you into His desired will for you. These are the works for which we have been created. We should submit ourselves to that and enjoy the fact that we are His trophies of grace. But there is a gospel truth in this passage that needs to be one of those nails driven deep into the floorboards of our lives, and it is that if you are struggling with that, well, I don't know if that is the way I want to live my life.

I mean, I like this Christian thing. It makes life a little easier, and I like the people, it gives me some sense of understanding what's going on in this world is to miss something. We have not been created to be nice people who think God exists alone, that that's all that matters, and then kind of we live as God-fearing people in this world. The apostle here is writing to believers saying, you were dead in your sin. Dead. Not dying, not flailing, not struggling. God didn't throw a life preserver into the pool and say, swim for it. He actually reached down and plucked our dead corpses off the bottom of the pool and breathed new life into us.

If you are resistant to this idea that you've been prepared for these good works and are a trophy of His grace and should walk in them, my guess is you haven't come to terms with the fact that you were dead in your sin, made alive in and through Christ Jesus. When you get your mind around that, it's hard not to see that the way you think and the way you live should be altered because you've been made alive. You are a new creation, a new work of poetry, a new handcrafted work of art, a new masterpiece to be on display to draw attention to the goodness and grace and love and mercy of your Creator, that he might be praised, that he may be glorified forever and ever. In the opening days of this semester, all of us should check ourselves. And to ask the Lord to strike down any resistance and rebellion, any unwillingness, any willfulness on our own part to resist and to fight back against this truth that we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them as dead men and women, Made alive through the shed blood and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is how we live our lives. This is how we should be living our lives in Christian community here at Cairn University. And it is our prayer that as we start a new academic year, this truth from our verse that we've selected from the year, that God would use it, that it would penetrate deeply into your minds and hearts, and God's Spirit would be at work to use His Word to accomplish His work in you. Great year ahead of us. Let's remember, yet not I, but Christ alone. Father in heaven, we pray that You might use this passage this year to impress upon us the truth that we have been made alive in and through Jesus Christ, that we are Your trophies of grace. Give us a desire not to attempt to earn that, but rather live in light of it. And we pray this in the strong name of Jesus. Amen.