

Thank you Executive Vice Chancellor Lucas, I am honored to be here. Good afternoon Chancellor Yang, Dean Morrison, faculty, families and graduates, I am honored indeed to be with you this afternoon.

We are gathered here to celebrate you graduates—you ascend to a new height today with the conferring of these graduate degrees.

And so I'd like to begin by saying: **you are not amazing**. Despite your accomplishments, your regalia, your degrees and pedigrees, you are not amazing—but you might be. Let me explain.

The Dalai Lama, in his book *Ethics for the New Millennium*—the book that was chosen this year for the UCSB Reads program—said,

“There is nothing amazing about being highly educated; there is nothing amazing about being rich. Only when the individual has a warm heart do these attributes become worthwhile.”

Well, I think it might be nice if your expensive education were to prove worthwhile, so I'd like to talk about the temperature of your hearts.

By warm heart, the Dalai Lama of course is not talking about the way you feel about your puppy. He is talking about an ethical principle that he sees as necessary for the peace and well-being of our fragile planet. He is talking about that imperative that is at the core of all the great world religions, about something more important than the practice of religion—he's talking about **compassion**.

In his book, as you know, he presents a long list of disciplines for achieving a practice of compassion. It's a daunting list. I recommend each and every virtue he names—but I know it's just darn hard to master them all. And I'm aware (in my work

with The Beatitudes Society with graduate students across the country) that the practice of compassion is not something that we naturally accumulate along with our degrees.

So today I want to offer you a short list, just the elementary basics--a toolkit for compassion. And because I know that commencement speeches are as forgettable as wedding sermons, I want to offer you a brief mnemonic device --the S-A-Ts. I want you to remember the SATs—not your high school SATs—but something new to tuck into your toolkit—along with your diplomas, resumes, job applications, and cleaned up FaceBook Profiles.

First, **S**. S means stop. Stop what you are doing. Stop working, stop pushing, stop achieving, stop producing. Stop texting, typing, clicking and twittering. Stop on a regular basis. At least once each day. Stop once a week. S means stop—it comes from something the ancients called Sabbath—the early Hebrew notion that workers ought to get a respite from oppressive overlords at least one day a week. Stopping was so important to them that they included it in their creation myth, in their definition of the Creator: on the seventh day, the story goes, God rested. The Hebrew word “rested” translates “exhaled.” God exhaled. Remember Sabbath, remember something you already know, deep in your bones, remember to exhale.

We have trouble remembering to exhale and we have trouble remembering that Sabbath was a time meant for rest, refreshment, delight. Over the centuries, we got it all wrong. Sabbath became a set of “thou shall nots:” do not work, do not dance, do not play cards.

The academy has done a bad job with the notion of Sabbath too—we know that **sabbaticals** are really only time away from classrooms and committees; time that must be justified by publication. Not time to exhale.

But the beauty of Sabbath persists across cultures. Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese monk, rings a small bell throughout the day in the Buddhist community of Plum Village, a “mindfulness bell.” When the bell rings, it is a signal for all to stop, to take three breaths, and then resume work.

Sabbath means you take time out to engage in the things that feed your body and soul: you eat, you dance, you listen, you make art and music and love and prayer.

You might stop for one full day each week; or it might be an afternoon, a moment. Whatever it is, if we are going to check on the temperature of our hearts, we all have to stop.

Working without stopping, Thomas Merton said, is a form of violence—one that we have perfected with our 24-hour days. This violence colors the way we gobble up resources; it hobbles our capacity for creativity and clear judgment; it tears at the fabric of our relationships. I am told that the Chinese pictograph for busyness is composed of two characters: Heart-plus-Killing.

Stopping is the single most live-saving thing we can do—the most counter-cultural act of resistance we can mount. We stop, so that we can pay attention:

A is for Attention. Be aware. Take a look at where you are. Did you see that cormorant over the lagoon—have you ever noticed one? Did you notice the look in your mother’s eyes when she saw you today in your funny hat? And how about the way *you* feel right now inside your own skin?

And what about the world beyond your own little sphere? What do you allow into your field of vision, your range of care?

This is the reason Thich Nhat Hanh rings the bell. Be here now. The bush is afire, Moses discovered, and took off his shoes to dance. Heaven is *here*, Jesus said, and

invited everyone to a party; this is the only moment we have to love one another. This moment matters.

Pay attention to what counts: What *do* you love? Is the work you are about to do with your new degree truly your vocation—that place where your deep joy meets the world's great need? Or is it just what everyone expects you to do?

One last letter, **T**. T is for thanks. Practice saying thanks. Start by thinking of all the people who helped you get here today. You know who helped you believe in yourself. Say thanks for them. And you also know who stood in your way, the ones who made your way a little rougher. Say thanks for them too; they were your best teachers, and there will be many more like *them* along the way.

Saying thanks reminds us that we are contingent beings. We are not alone. You are, I am, more than a solitary mouse-clicking unit staring into a flat screen. We depend upon one another. We know in the 21st century that we can no longer live in our old myth of Western individualism; we do not ride alone on our ponies into the Western sunset. We are learning, after all those cowboy movies, what our great-grandparents knew—and Ayn Rand didn't: we are better when we stand together, when we recognize our common ground, when we raise a barn roof or build a school or design a national health care system together—for the common good.

Most of you were born around the beginning of the 1980s—you spoke your first words in that decade known as the “me” decade; and here you are in a new century characterized by a new vocabulary: you live a reality shaped by words like network, internet, linked, global, web.

Saying thanks is one simple way to be mindful of your complex web of relationships, and of that pulse of Compassion that beats at the heart of the universe.

That's it, the SATs. Three letters—and one last quick thing, a picture, a snapshot to paste to the lid of your compassion toolbox; it's a picture of your Wild Space.

Wild Space is theologian Sallie McFague's term for that part in each one of us that does not fit our consumer culture's definition of the good life.

McFague suggests that we discover our Wild Space this way: imagine a circle. Within that circle is the model of the dominant culture: white, Western, male, middle-class, heterosexual, educated, able-bodied, successful. Now, put your own image of yourself over that circle. Some parts may fit that model, some may not. The part of us that falls outside the circle is our Wild Space.

The parts that don't fit may be obvious: race or gender. Some aren't so obvious: surviving a failure, or a loss, the struggle with addiction, or simply our refusal to buy into convention. Anything that causes us to question the dominant culture's notion of success is our Wild Space.

It's our Wild Space that allows us to question our definitions of power and so discover more egalitarian ways relate to one another. Our Wild Space allows us to re-imagine the way we consume the earth's resources and so live in such a way that cares for our planet and our neighbors. It's our Wild Space that allows us to create an alternative vision of the good life. Wild Space is our hidden key to the practice of compassion.

So that's the tool kit:

Stop. Pay attention. Say thank you. And keep an eye on your Wild Space. I bet your heart will not only warm, it will light on fire.

And then you might just be *amazing*. I hope so. God knows we need you, our planet needs **you**, to be nothing less than amazing. Thank you.