

Graduate Commencement 2018

- June 17, 2018
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Welcome to your graduate commencement from Seattle University. Congratulations to the graduating students with your advanced degrees and your empowerment for professional service. Congratulations also to the husbands and wives and partners and parents and families and children and friends, professors, mentors and colleagues who have accompanied you on your journey to this day. You do not walk unaccompanied across the stage; so many walk with you and celebrate with you.

This morning I spoke at the undergraduate commencement about the memories those students take with them and how those memories have shaped their stories, their narratives, who they now are. That is true also of you, but for you the balance may have tipped from what you take from Seattle U. toward what you brought to it and to your colleagues. You came here knowing who you were and what you wanted. You came with experiences from work, and service, and family, and life. I believe that what you sought was depth. To take all you were, to deepen it, to equip it for greater influence, to broaden its scope, to ground and give roots to it, and to strengthen your calling, your vocation, your depth.

You found your way to develop this depth in your graduate studies, your cohorts of colleagues, with your professors and mentors in your practicums and projects. You are much deeper today than when you started at Seattle U. This depth will provide a stability, a steadiness, a continuity, a confidence, a pursuit of opportunity and a persistent overcoming of obstacles in your careers of work and service, and in your way of life itself.

I have a bias about depth. Perhaps that is true of any Jesuit in his thinking and praying and in his ministry to people in their deepest needs. Someone recently told me they saw me as “a priest moonlighting as a president”! My bias about depth finds its most wonderful and delightful and animating source in poetry. I’m not sure I could live without poetry. I didn’t always read poetry every day as I so look forward to doing every day now. I came to it later in life. Perhaps I wasn’t ready for it earlier on, or didn’t need it, or didn’t know how to give myself to it in the full way—not just an intellectual way—that poetry requires. It is in poetry, especially, that I find depth. It gets beneath the hard surfaces of my life, cracks the pavement or the crust, sends shoots down into the nuanced soil of the depth of my life that would remain inarticulate for me except for poetry’s ability to speak or sing or whisper from those depths.

So when I was able to make my pitch for who would receive an honorary degree and be the commencement speaker at your graduate commencement—you persons of depth—I advocated for a poet. Not just any poet but a poet of our region and of our state and even of our university. He has taught me more than anyone else about the enjoyment of poetry. For many other reasons, but also for that one, he is my friend. Please join me in welcoming poet Sam Green.