

Good Evening Whirlies!

It is wonderful to see so many of us gathered together this evening! The committee has done a wonderful job. They have worked so hard to plan our reunion. I'm grateful for their hard work, their creativity and perseverance in trying to get everyone here. Would everyone who served on the planning committee please stand so we can recognize you and say thank you!

I am keenly aware that some of our cherished friends are no longer with us. I especially miss my dear friend Patty Bridges Soto who loved our reunion gatherings over the years. Patty and my Dad were the most dedicated Duke football fans I knew and they were best of friends.. Patty even tried to arrange to get Coach Cutcliffe to bring my dad into the locker room to give the players a pep talk one year when they weren't doing so well. Dad died in 2012 two hours after listening to Duke beat Carolina in football for the first time in 25 years. That's when I knew that God loves Duke football. Tonight those two have one eye on what's happening here and the other on the Duke/Pittsburgh football game. And If there wasn't a Duke football room in heaven I am pretty sure there is now. I love and miss them both as we miss so many of our friends.

Perhaps you are wondering why I am giving the Invocation tonight.

In 2015 I returned to school at the age of 63 to attend Duke Divinity School. This had never been in my thoughts or plans. In August of 2014, one of our classmates, Pat Phillips Rucker, bought a ticket for me to hear two

Mozambican missionaries at a church in Durham. When Rolland Baker spoke on 2 Peter Chapter 1, my life changed as I heard God speak to my heart. That still small Voice had spoken. Honestly, I was stunned. As I thought about what I had heard I knew I would have to go back to school. I decided to tell my plans to the most challenging person I could think of and so I met the former chair of my department at the School of Public Health for lunch. I told her that I was considering applying to Duke Divinity School. And to my surprise, she said, 'yes, you should, and I will write you a reference'. Several months later I was admitted to Duke's Divinity School where I started in the fall of 2015 at the age of 63.

After this Pat said, now you have to go to Mozambique before you start at Duke. So I listened to my friend and spent ten weeks in Mozambique on the Iris Ministry Base in Pemba and while there I saw miracles take place. Friends and I prayed for a blind and lame man who lived in a hut in the African bush and his cloudy white eyes turned blue and he could see. We prayed for his lame legs and he stood up from the rope bed where he had lain so long that the ropes were rotten and his legs which had been covered with sores had dangled to the ground. He walked with us back to the path we had come from and we left him standing there with new eyes and new legs.

A woman who was on the staff of the ministry had a terrible accident and was crushed between a multi ton truck and a concrete building. She lay lifeless on the ground while we sang hymns and prayed. There was no hospital for that kind of injury in Pemba. After three hours, when the

children and the director came to the base and began to pray over her, I heard her laugh out loud and praise the name of Jesus. She was restored to life from death. Today she shares her testimony throughout England where she lives.

Why am I sharing this with you tonight? Because I want all of us to know that God has a plan for our lives and He intends us to be fruitful all the days of our lives. He wants to do the same things in you and through you that He did in Mozambique.....He is a God of miracles. Does this mean our lives will be without pain and suffering? No. But it does mean that God never leaves us and never forsakes us and that He knows each one of us and has a uniquely designed plan for you.

When we seek Him with all our hearts, we will find Him. He delights to offer us good things. We have never made too many mistakes, are too old or too anything to be beyond what God wants to do in and through us.

Those who know me know that I have made many mistakes in my life--as have we all. Here is my answer: from Psalm 32.

“Then I finally admitted to You all my sins, refusing to hide them any longer. I said, “my life-giving God, I will openly acknowledge my evil actions.” And you forgave me!

There is nothing about my life that is more special than yours. Each of us is created for a purpose and a plan that was made with great Love.

Please feel free to talk with me about anything I've said, and don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. One discovery I have made over these past years is that it is likely I have a Jewish heritage. My great grandfather's name was Balfour Zachariah Routh and when I was in Israel, I was told that each of those names is Jewish. One of the characteristics of what I believe is from my Jewish heritage is that I love to ask questions, like the Rabbis of old. I love to try to understand things. One of my favorite Bible professors at Duke said to me one day in class, Martha, this is the last question you can ask for today. Even though I don't have all the answers, you can ask me any question you may have.

There is much more I would love to share. Stories of what God is doing in Mozambique, in Durham, on the streets of London, in the Middle East, all places I have had the privilege to do see God at work since 2015.

A friend who serves in ministry at the age of 70 recently asked me, why didn't anyone tell us what a great adventure this would be--this life with God? I thought for a moment and said, "Maybe people have confused religion with a relationship with God and we are supposed to help them see the difference."

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you this evening.

Now please join me as we pray.

Father God, Author of all creation, we thank you for bringing us together this evening. Thank you that the plans you have for us, even now, are Good! Show us the way that you would have us to go to bring healing and hope and restoration where there is pain and sorrow and hurt. Help us to see the goodness and love in those around us. May we be merciful to others as You have been merciful to us. Thank you for the abundant blessings in our lives; may we be a blessing to others.

Now I pray that you would Bless the food we are about to receive, Bless the hands that prepared it and that serve it; bless the ground upon which our sustenance grows.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.