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Gilford ~~Middle~~ High Assembly 10-15 min.

Also for

Laconia High School Assembly 10-15 min.

I am honored to talk to you all today. Life is so much more complex and fast-moving than when I went to school, and things were already hard enough back then.

I would like to try to give you something of value in my brief remarks today --some piece of useful knowledge that perhaps is easier to hear from someone who has lived a long time.

It is the simple fact that the world as it was back when I was your age is still with us, and you live in that world, too. And the world

of several hundred years ago is also still with us, as is the world of the misty, prehistoric past.. We live in a many-layered world, and we are many-layered people. Each era of our history makes a contribution to the way we live our lives, and each era imposes expectations upon us to this day. Unless we understand that fact, we will have a hard time navigating through the conflicting rules and expectations of life. Think of life as a seven-layer cake and you will do all right.

As an example, over the years as women have moved to equal status with men, I have often overheard young men complaining about the mixed messages—are they supposed to open a door for a woman or not, pick up a check at a restaurant or not? Aren't they supposed to now treat a woman as a total equal? They are confused because they don't understand that a person is not one thing. A person is many layered. There is certainly a

very old layer where women are princesses and men are princes, and that layer needs to be acknowledged sometimes when the moment is right and a carriage door needs opening. That layer is still with us and it glows under the moon. There is also of course a modern workplace layer, where men and women are colleagues or employees and where they treat each other in a businesslike way, without reference to gender, and where it is a great sin to open a door for someone instead of an equal opportunity.

And there is, of course, an ancient, biological layer that compels a man to aggressively seek mates and compels a woman to find the resources for a safe and respectable nest. This is just one layer, but it must be acknowledged and given its due. Because it is one of the oldest layers, it is the first one you come across as you approach maturity. Though you may not

believe me, there is more to life than that layer.

There are also layers from our own childhood, still there intact, demanding comfort and security and the freedom to creatively explore.

So you must look at a person and see all of this, if you are to see truly--which is to say, wisely.

When we make snap judgments about people, based on some single quality, we dehumanize them, and that is a great crime, indeed. I know you have probably had the experience of being in the same activity with someone and getting to know them, even though you never might have talked to that person on your own. But you became good friends or at least you came to respect each other. That happened because you got down a few layers with that person.

Most people are worth knowing, if you will take time to understand them. Unfamiliarity with other people, ignorance of other people, is what makes war possible and violence possible, and it drives all the social divisions in a school or in a town or a nation or a world. When you understand people well enough, you can't help but love them, even if you hate them, too. If you think those are incompatible emotions, I remind you to think about your relationship with almost any close family member.

Understanding people is indeed loving them. If you hate them and if your hate is not balanced by some love for them, it is a sign of your ignorance, for you simply do not understand them well enough yet. Hatred is what we feel when we do not understand.

Are there some people so over the top with their evil deeds that they do not qualify for this sweeping statement of mine? Some people may take more understanding than

we are capable of possessing. We must accept our own limitations.

One of the most difficult and important tasks we have as humans is to regularly, and sometimes without cause, forgive each other and move ahead with our lives together. If one layer of someone's personality flares up and causes us harm, we must try to put it in perspective among all the other layers of ~~a~~ that life.

A long marriage requires the willingness to do that, time and again. No relationship can long survive on the basis of what happens in just one or just a few of those layers. Understanding and forgiveness requires a view of the whole person.

That whole view can also help us to forgive ourselves. It is a great act of maturity, I think, to not condemn yourself or define yourself by what goes on within just one of these different layers, some of which are

intensely biological or set down in cement in early youth. Sometimes we are given to suddenly see with great clarity an amoral and reptilian side of our own motivations, but it is wrong to think we have suddenly discovered our real self. That one layer is no more important than the layers of loving kindness, so long as the negative layer is not given free rein.

Emotional maturity is the ability to stay balanced, not letting any one layer dominate our lives. I do not mean that we should fiercely suppress the darker layers, for to do so causes us to transfer our fear and loathing onto other people. But we must give every layer an opportunity to go for its walk at a time when it will do no harm. And our more positive layers we must of course encourage and put in the company of like souls, for the most important thing we can do for ourselves is to surround ourselves with people we respect for the best reasons

--we simply cannot help but become like the people around us.

After acknowledging and coming to understand the layers of life, a gentleman may finally come to know when to open the door for a lady and when to share a check. A woman may come to know that a fellow is more than the polygamous forest creature he sometimes seems --He is also the artist and the prince, the poet and the friend. It is not easy, of course, to negotiate through all the layers laid down through the eons of evolution and the rise of civilization, but if life were easy it would be a bore. Life is that seven layer cake, and so are our hearts.

It has a layer of icing, by the way; it is not youth or victory or wealth, but a smiling measure of enlightenment and love that comes as we live with our eyes and our minds and our hearts wide open.