

Bugema University
Commencement Address

Good Morning and thank-you for the privilege to participate in this graduation. Congratulations to the Board of Trustees, University President Dr. Patrick Manu and fellow officers, along with the faculty and staff for the completion of another academic year and for presenting such a fine graduating class.

And most of all, Congratulations to you, Graduates, this is your moment, you have made it and its time to celebrate. Celebrate what has been accomplished, what you have done with God's help, your commitment and hard work, and of course the efforts of dedicated and talented professors, gifted administrators, and the wonderful support of family and friends.

I bring you greetings from North America. First from the Columbia Union Conference, home to almost 150,000 members of the SDA in nearly 1,000 churches, 2 healthcare systems representing 13 hospitals, and our own school of higher learning, WAU, Dr. Weymouth Spence president. And of course last but not least Dr. Richard Raj our mutual friend and supporter of Bugema University.

I should also mention the Columbia Union Conference has within in its territory the seat of power and federal government for the United States, Washington DC. And contains the world headquarters for the SDA church, the General Conference located in Silver Springs, MD.

And now a few thoughts – you know I've come a long way just to share this moment with you. I recall visiting your sister school in the Congo a few years ago, Lakange Adventist University near Butembo, Democratic Republic of Congo. On the main leading to the school our car came to a gated checkpoint. The guard looked in our vehicle and said something in his native tongue to our group and they all began to laugh. Not knowing the language I asked my host, Dr. Geoffrey Mbwana, who was in the car, "What is so funny?" To which he replied, "He seldom sees a person like you in these parts, so he wanted to know. 'What does the white man say?' " So today if he were here he would find out.

I like your theme for this graduation weekend. "Let Your Light So Shine."

Light is a wonderful thing especially when you are in the dark. Who hasn't attempted to walk in darkness, feeling one's way through, hoping not to trip and fall & then someone or you yourself turns on the light, Ah how good is that light!

I want to share a few brief stories to lay the foundation for what I want to share with you this morning:

First...

During my early ministry I was the pastor of a church in a southern city in the USA – it wasn't especially prominent, like NYC or DC. It was in Florida – on the gulf coast (Gulf of Mexico) but it had the summer home of a very famous person – Thomas Edison. He had since passed away when I worked in that town – but his house was still there, preserved as a historical place. For he was famous, one of the greatest inventors of all times – he had over 1,000 patents (his own creation). But of course he is most known for what is considered his greatest invention – the light bulb.

Second...

A few years ago I had the privilege of visiting Wittenberg in central Germany, actually it was with our university president, Dr. Spence. Why would anyone take the time to visit little out of the way Wittenberg. But that wasn't all we also went to Wartburg Castle, Erfurt, Worms, etc. We were touring significant sites of the Protestant Reformation. And of course it was at Wittenberg that theology professor, Martin Luther, nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle church challenging the church of his day regarding numerous practices he considered inconsistent with biblical truth. Next year 2017 much of the Protestant world will celebrate the 500th Anniversary of his brave act. And as we have the privilege of looking back in time to his significant challenge to the errors of his day we place him with a number of other reformers during the Dark Ages and claim his work was a major part of the light illuminating truths from God's Holy Word.

The third story...

Standing in the outer court of the temple in Jerusalem during a Jewish festival we find a young Galilean itinerant preacher proclaim, "I am the light of the world."

When He spoke these words, Jesus was in the court of the temple specially connected with the services of the Feast of Tabernacles. In the center of this court rose two lofty standards, supporting lampstands of great size. After the evening sacrifice, all the lamps were kindled, shedding their light over Jerusalem. This ceremony was in commemoration of the pillar of light that guided Israel in the desert, and was also regarded as pointing to the coming of the Messiah. At evening when the lamps were lighted, the court was a scene of great rejoicing. Gray-haired men, the priests of the temple and the rulers of the

people, united in the festive dances to the sound of instrumental music and the chants of the Levites.

In the illumination of Jerusalem, the people expressed their hope of the Messiah's coming to shed His light upon Israel. But to Jesus the scene had a wider meaning. As the radiant lamps of the temple lighted up all about them, so Christ, the source of spiritual light, illumines the darkness of the world. Yet the symbol was imperfect. That great light which His own hand had set in the heavens was a truer representation of the glory of His mission.

It was morning; the sun had just risen above the Mount of Olives, and its rays fell with dazzling brightness on the marble palaces, and lighted up the gold of the temple walls, when Jesus, pointing to it, said, "I am the light of the world."

This is by no means a small claim... the light of the world. As the sun by day and the moon by night. Claiming to be the light of the world was no small assertion – it has tremendous meaning, but what?

The final story...

Jesus is teaching one of His most famous of all sermons – the Sermon on the Mount.

The wonderful beatitudes...

"Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed *are* those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.

⁵ Blessed *are* the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.

The world would be a better place if we practiced these. And then he moves from describing admirable follower behavior, behavior that would emulate His own virtues to establishing the place He has chosen for His followers, for He says:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all

who are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5.

Stories – all about light. Stories I want to draw lessons from today as we celebrate your accomplishments as we acknowledge the completion of a journey of education and learning.

- I. Thomas Edison – the light of innovation
- II. Martin Luther – the light of truth
- III. Jesus Christ – the source of light
- IV. You and me – reflectors of the true light

I. The Light of Innovation & Discovery

Edison began with knowledge what he did - he did because he had knowledge. Knowledge along with the desire to know more. To experiment and learn, to discover reflect and learn. Experts in the field of education call it “experiential learning” – where one experiments with “abstract concepts” in expressing those ideas in a “here-and-now concrete experience” and then repeating the process creates a moment of learning.

Thomas Edison after many experiments, and I want to emphasize **many**, first with [carbon](#) filaments and then with [platinum](#) and other metals, conducted the first successful test was with a carbon filament on October 22, 1879; it lasted 13.5 hours. Edison continued to improve this design and by November 4, 1879, filed for U.S. patent 223,898 (granted on January 27, 1880) for an electric lamp using "a carbon filament or strip coiled and connected to platina contact wires". This was the first commercially practical incandescent light.

Edison taught us through innovation and experiment we can have light. Light that can change the world. Who would think of having a modern home today without a light bulb?

Today you might think you have come to the end of the journey for learning – now you have an education. My I submit to you this in not the end but only a new

chapter. Yes we celebrate your accomplishment, an incredible one, for some of you – you are the first of your family to obtain a degree of higher learning, first to have the family’s name on a diploma from a university – wow! Exciting! And some of you are following in the footsteps of an older sibling or father or mother. You have made it – you’ve earned this diploma – you should feel proud, in a modest way. But whether you are the first or extending a family tradition you are writing a new chapter – one that you **can** write thanks in part to the support and love you received from your precious family.

I appeal to you to be an innovator – like Edison bring some light to this world. Write that new chapter in such a way that your innovation will make life better for you extended family. Your family here in Africa, in Asia, in Europe, in the Americas, in Australia, and the list could go on and on. In the Artics.

You are in the minority in this world of nearly 7 billion people most individuals never hold their hand a diploma that they have earned from a school of higher learning. According to recent study from Harvard University about 7 people in a hundred of the worlds population have a degree. And even fewer can claim to have one from a SDA institution and even fewer possess one from this fine university, Bugema. You now have a knowledge base, a platform, to be an innovator that can change our world - our global family.

Hopefully someone or should a say some research team is going to discover a cure for cancer, for Ebola, for HIV, making the world a better place. I wonder graduate could that someone be you? An innovator, a research, a business man helping to finance such noble endeavors. Could that be you?

II. The Light of Truth

Graduates I have a True or False Question for you. Here it goes: True or False – “A supposition or belief is based on either truth or error.”

500 years ago next October the Protestant world will remember Martin Luther, for being a force to share truth, biblical truth, illuminating it and dispelling philosophical and theological darkness in the Dark Ages.

Luther the son of a miner who wanted his son to be an attorney sent him to a university to receive the needed education – hoping his life would be enriched by his son’s education. Because an attorney would provide a nice income one the providing father could benefit by.

But Luther became converted and possessing an inquiring mind became eventually a student of the Word of God. It would be years after his initial conversion experience that he saw the blatant contrast between truth and error.

The narrative tells it well. The Pope was raising money to build St. Peter's Basilica that ornate church in the heart of the Vatican and Johann Tetzel had come to Luther's town selling Indulgences – its all there in the story of the Protestant Reformation. What is an Indulgence? It is the idea that you can pay money to have your sins forgiven.

Luther claimed the Bible taught the just shall live by faith and salvation was a gift – not to be bought by money. And so this one preacher-professor challenged the church of Rome in its practice – claiming that it was teaching and encouraging error. That in reality it was deceiving the people.

The showdown came in 1521 at the Council of Worms – when Luther stood before the emperor and prelates of the church and defended his position, stating,

“Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by the clearest reasoning, unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted, and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the word of God, I cannot and I will not retract, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand, I can do no other; may God help me.” (D'Aubigne)

Some call this the beginning of the modern world and the end of the Dark Ages – the Light of Truth was opening the way. A dungeon of orthodoxy and conformity to the traditions of man – dogma that had its foundation not that of holy scripture but rather the decisions and councils of men. For one can trace effects of the Protestant Reformation on the world, on both thought and practice, such as: (1) Freedom of thought, (2) Individualism, (3) the Work Ethic.

We should never forget the significant role professors and preachers from a university or college assisted in the quest of arriving at a more perfect truth. There is a long line of reformers most of them originated from university, Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, and others.

Individuals committed to seeking the truth and leading others to follow in the way of it. Graduates as you leave this place today you will hold in your hand a diploma from a Protestant Christian Institution – remember your heritage. Live in the light of Truth.

A famous Christian author once wrote:

The greatest want of the world is the want of men-- men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall. (*Education*, page 57)

III. Jesus Christ – the Source.

Bill George in *True North* discusses that place in everyone life and belief system that is its guiding principle – he calls it the “True North.” Again referring it to the North Star (light). For mariners of old would use the light of the North Star to keep their ships on course.

It is an incredible claim, to say that you are the “light of the world” unless indeed you are.

The New Testament writers are clear...

"In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness apprehends it not." "That was the true light, which lights every man that cometh into the world." John 1:4, 5, 9.

And long after Jesus had ascended to heaven, Peter also, writing under the illumination of the divine Spirit, recalled the symbol Christ had used: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts." 2 Peter 1:19.

He is our North Star. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Author and the Finisher of our faith. He is the source of all knowledge – because He is God Almighty.

Solomon had it right when he wrote:

The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge. Proverbs 1:7

The story is told of a large ship at sea in the night in the midst of a storm when it came upon what it believed was another ship. It signaled through the darkness to other ship to move from its path because it was in the way, “Please move from my path,” it signaled. Back came the response, “I cannot move, you must move.” Somewhat offended by this message the big ship sent another message, “this is the battleship the...” and gave its prominent name, surely now the other one would move. When in response came the unbelievable message, “This is the lighthouse, you move!”

That my dear graduate it the place of Jesus Christ in our lives – He is the Source, He is our light, He is the North Star.

IV. The Reflectors

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all

who are in the house. ¹⁶Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Graduates – you are wanted. The world today needs light. Our society is struggling for moral direction. You are the light, you possess the knowledge to show the way because you know the Source. You know God. Today as you leave this place be a reflector of Him. Live for Him. Loose yourself in Him.

Then He said to *them* all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily,^[a] and follow Me. ²⁴For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it