



BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY *at* RICHMOND

THE BLESSING OF THE TOWELS

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BTSR Final Commencement

Will you please locate your towel and place it in your hand.

LMB: [Hold up the towel—the first one used in 1991] This is a simple, utilitarian piece of fabric, yet a symbol that BTSR has invested with deep meaning through these thirty years. This is a simple piece of cloth that can clean faces of children after play, clear crumbs from a busy kitchen table, and yes, wash dusty, dirty, sandal-wearing feet of tired, disciples as the ancient biblical story tells us.

This simple towel, introduced to BTSR by the founding president Tom Graves, has become a deep and abiding symbol for each of us. This simple towel represents our family of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond through these thirty years of living together. We have aspired to serve one another and also the communities to whom we have been called to serve.

This symbol of the towel represents service:

for the common good, not for personal gain;

service that creates goodness and kindness in the world not chaos and confusion;

service that repeatedly says, “Not I, but you, you go first”;

service that calls for **both firm accountability and generous grace** in the very same breath;

service that understands that failure can be success, defeat can signal growth, and suffering can serve for gain.

This towel belongs to you now fully—now more than ever. When you look at it in your church study, your work office, your home family room, or tucked away in a hall closet somewhere, please know that **this is BTSR---for this is you**. No buildings remain, BTSR will have no geographical place to call home—just you, you, and you. **You are BTSR!**

And how you choose to live in this world, having lived in this community, whether it be for three years or for thirty, will reveal the future of BTSR.

Hear now the words of our master Teacher, ancient words from the first century embedded in this beloved ancient ritual recorded in John's Gospel:

"And so when He had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and reclined at table again, He said to them, "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."

I now ask the **graduating class of 2019** to hold your towels up for a blessing. We honor you today and send you out to be a blessing to others as you have been blessed by BTSR.

And for those BTSR **students in transition**, as you go to your new place of study, continue to honor the meaning of this towel. May it be a reminder of the community where you began your work and give you courage to continue being faithful to your theological studies.

And **now for all of us**, former faculty and staff, students, and trustees, those BTSR Towel Bearers, while holding our towels high in the air, receive this final blessing:

May the God who called Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond into being, who brought us together and sustained our life for these thirty years, who called the called ones to come together to learn, play, and worship, now O God, do bless and keep us from this time forth. May BTSR continue in the lives of us who hold these towels in our hands, who are still ready to serve because we have been served by BTSR. May God bless the memory of BTSR. May we all be able to say, now and if not now, somewhere into the future:

"With gratitude for all that has been we offer our deep thanks and for all that is to come, yet fully seen in our lives, we say yes" (Dag Hammerskjold, Markings).

And all the people said, "Amen."