

Good morning,

It is frequently helpful to have opportunities to remind us of things that are, or should be of great importance. Today we are assembled to participate in one of the purest forms of democracy. In doing so we affirm that democracy still thrives. Despite what may seem chaotic at times, communities around the state and nation are gathering, debating and deciding the direction and priorities of their communities. I am here today to speak to you about a similar opportunity to affirm a commitment to each other and in the humanity that forms the foundation of our community in Lyme.

Recent tragedies in Florida remind us of our own frailty and the frailty of our communities. As individuals we recognize how life can be needlessly short and how vulnerable we are as human beings to the ravages of isolation or mental illness.

As communities we are reminded that even today, right here, some of our neighbors may be experiencing this kind of overwhelming isolation and desperation. It is this state of being, for a very small proportion of people, which can lead to desperate and terrible acts upon themselves or others.

Despite the breadth of the debate that has resulted from our most recent school shooting, and the variety of which factors each of us feel are responsible, there is a solid foundation of common ground.

This common ground is concentrated on our communal responsibility to protect the vulnerable, whether they be children, the sick or the disenfranchised.

And maybe most importantly, we are not powerless. We have the ability to defend against such events occurring in our community. This power resides in our ability to ensure that we do not allow our neighbors to struggle alone, we engage each other with civility, and compassion, and even those we do not agree with, we recognize them as our neighbors and not adversaries.

Fear exists where we lack understanding, in a town of our size, in a town which has been able to exhibit the characteristics I speak of, neighbors should always know each other well enough for understanding to exist.

Members of the Parkland community have promoted March 14th be a day of recognition. My hope, and reason for speaking here today, is to invite you to join me in front of the school from 10:00 -10:17, we can affirm to one another that our community fosters understanding and befriends the isolated. That we can civilly debate our differences and own our responsibilities, and, above all else, protect those that are vulnerable in a manner in which we can all feel safe- again.

This assembly is open to community members and those middle school students who voluntarily wish to participate and any other student whose parents wish them to join them. **It is neither a protest nor a rally, it is not about politics, or amendments, it is about commitments** – commitments to ourselves, to our neighbor's and their children and to all those who are alone or need our support. It is Lyme stating to those that learn each day in our schools, gather in our churches or any community space, we are committed to civility and our ordained responsibility to care for the well-being of others.

Please join me, please convince me and all that bear witness, that our fears do not define what we expect of one another -- that actions resulting from our lesser selves can be overcome by the will of our better selves. That the shadow cast by often overwhelming fear, will retreat in the presence of compassion, civility and care for one's fellow man and woman. I ask you to be a symbol that strengthens our faith that we can all become the person we aspire to be.

Thank you. I hope you will join me on the 14th.

- Jeff Valence
Principal, Lyme School