When Haley asked if I would speak at tonight’s vespers, the first thing that came to my mind was:

“I hope I can say something as meaningful as the 50 or so other people I have heard in my time here!” So, here goes…

While my name is made up and has no actual meaning, my older brother tells me that it means “hope” from Espe, and “grace” from Ana. Hope Grace. And while I do not consider myself a very graceful person, hope has always driven me.

In March of 2020 however, I had none. As my university told me not to return to campus after spring break, and my freshman year was cut short, I was stripped of the newfound independence I had gained and loved. Now I could spin this and say that being at home in itself was allowing me to give hope to the end of the pandemic, and while that is true, I did not feel any hope.

At the beginning of quarantine, my days consisted of not sleeping, but only ever leaving my bed to make my hundred loaves of banana bread. The things I looked forward to and loved, like seeing my friends, being at school, coming to Wawenock, and seeing Harry Styles in concert, all seemed like distant intangible wishes.

While six-plus hour-long facetime calls with friends and days filled with self-reflection became a new norm that would brighten and fill my days, I could not help but wonder if there would be more in store for my summer.

Throughout May, as a series of Wawenock staff zoom calls commenced, I began to feel a sensation in my stomach that I had not allowed myself to feel in months… no, it was not gas, it was much more fulfilling, it was hope. The idea of being able to return to my summer home allowed me to consider a glimmer of normalcy in a time that was anything but.

May 22nd, 2020. In the midst of a global pandemic, the largest civil rights movement in history, and my personal uncertainty, Camp Wawenock was officially going to have a 2020 season. With so much uncertainty in the world, and in my life, there was also the orange and blue, sing-songy laughter of hope that you can only get at 04071.

In the following months, I found myself smiling at everything. As my thoughts of Sebago, old friends, and having something go as planned filled my days. While I felt mildly guilty about being so fortunate to escape the chaotic world that exists before the camp road, I also knew I would be giving myself, my peers, and many campers a reminder that beauty, laughter, and silliness can still exist when everything seems to point in the opposite direction.

Since the moment I stepped foot on Wawenock soil, hope has been everywhere. I see hope in our strategic dining hall set-up. I see hope in campers readily adjusting to an altered version of camp. I see hope in our refusal to believe that it will rain during activities and meals. I see it when Grace Eberle shouts “I hope the weather stays nice for Archery today” And I see hope in every single person at camp, because what else pushes you to come to a place so untouched by the outside world other than the hope of something fulfilling, joyous, and normal.

Every morning that I wake up in my cabin, I really do have to pinch myself. Wawenock has helped me relocate something I really cannot afford to lose.

I hope you all can look around and truly embrace the warmth, beauty, and reassurance that seeps out of every part of this camp - from these image rocks to the trusty welcome sign that greets you on your way into camp.

* Espeana Green (Camper ’08-’16, Staff ’18-’20)