

BYU-IDAHO COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES

Gordon B. Hinckley—President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

President Bednar has said that this will be the shortest commencement ever. I am grateful for the opportunity to live through that experience. Commencement exercises are usually interminably long.

Thank you very much for the honor you have accorded me. I cannot tell you how grateful I am. Thank you so very much.

As we have been reminded, this is the first commencement for BYU-Idaho, and it is a special privilege to be the first recipient of an honorary doctorate from this institution.

May I take just a moment to tell you about the change that has occurred at this school. As Chairman of the Church Board of Education, I have long been troubled over the fact that we are educating an ever diminishing percentage of the young people of the Church. While reflecting on this fact the thought came, and I am confident it was inspiration, that we could increase the number touched by our higher education program if Ricks were to become a four-year school offering baccalaureate degrees. There would be fewer transfer students and this would make it possible for BYU in Provo to accept more students.

This would be a drastic move for Ricks, but it would be worth the effort. Hopefully, without giving any offense to the Ricks family and their illustrious forebear for whom the college was named, we could rename it BYU-Idaho, as we previously had changed the name of the Church College of Hawaii to BYU-Hawaii.

I felt strongly that if we were to do this it should be done while President Bednar presided over the school. We recognized that he has a unique capacity. He is not shackled by academic tradition. He has an understanding of how computer learning can be used in such a situation.

He has succeeded brilliantly. It has been a complex undertaking, and I do not know of anyone else who could have accomplished this. I commend him and thank him for his remarkable work. I likewise commend and thank the faculty who have been so cooperative, who have been so enthusiastic, and who have been willing to give up certain prerogatives in order to accomplish this.

We determined that we would have to give up intercollegiate athletics. They are so costly. I recognize that many of you students feel this has been a terrible sacrifice, that it is almost impossible to conceive of a four-year institution that does not have an exciting program of intercollegiate sports.

While reflecting on this fact the thought came, and I am confident it was inspiration, that we could increase the number touched by our higher education program if Ricks were to become a four-year school offering baccalaureate degrees.

But I assure you that this is not unique.

For instance, I suppose all of you have heard of Emory University in Georgia. It is an outstanding institution, widely renowned. The president of that university recently wrote:

Emory University is not known as an athletic powerhouse. It has no football program. It has no stadium. It is without a basketball arena to hold thousands of spectators. Students are not attracted here by athletic scholarships. Nor, on an Emory team, are they ever to achieve national fame in a bowl game or a nationally televised final four in basketball.

Emory University essentially carries forward the same kind of program that you do. And there are others who do likewise.

So much for that. And now to get into a commencement address.

I am always impressed with two hymns which we sing in the Church. The first was written by one of our own, Evan Stephens. It reads:

Shall the youth of Zion falter
In defending truth and right?
While the enemy assaileth,
Shall we shrink or shun the fight?
No!
True to the faith that our parents have cherished,
True to the truth for which martyrs have perished,
To God's command,
Soul, heart, and hand,
Faithful and true we will ever stand.

That is a wonderful declaration. All of us ought to sing it occasionally. We ought to sing it with conviction and power and determination.

The other was written by Frederick W. Favor, who lived long ago. It also concludes with a stirring statement:

Faith of our fathers, holy faith,
We will be true to thee till death!

That, too, is a great declaration. To everyone who sings it. To everyone who utters those words it is a statement, a resolution, of determination:

Faith of our fathers, holy faith,
We will be true to thee till death!

If there is anything that the people of this sad old world need, it is to stand and make such a declaration. How we need faith! How we need the strength that comes of it. How we need the will to exercise it. How we need the determination to practice it.

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Keep the faith. This is my message to you this morning. What a wonderful generation you are. You are young and bright and forward looking. You are men and women of integrity, of high hopes, of ambition.

Never before in the history of this Church has there been a better generation than you, notwithstanding all of the seductive voices that constantly invite you to abandon the faith of your fathers and indulge in that which is faithless and empty.

I think of the 14-year-old boy, Joseph, reading in the family Bible those challenging words of James:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed (James 1:5, 6).

With that promise before him, he said:

**And so my challenge
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faith in the Church,
faith in God, your
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Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know.

I at length came to the determination to 'ask of God,' concluding that if He gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture (JSH 1:12, 13).

Think of the consequences of that act of faith.

On that spring day, after centuries of time, the curtains were parted and there appeared before him God the Eternal Father, and the Risen Lord. From that grand event has come all that this Church is today. You are here because of it. You would not be here if Joseph had not gone in prayer, in simple faith.

Someone, I think it was Emerson, has said that every great institution is the lengthened shadow of a great man. I would add that it is the lengthened shadow of a man who acted in faith.

And so my challenge to you this morning is that throughout your lives you cultivate and act with faith-faith in yourselves, faith in your associates, faith in the Church, faith in God, your Eternal Father.

KEEP FAITH WITH YOURSELVES

Channing Pollock, a great playwright in his day, once said: "We begin with a banner inscribed Excelsior and gradually the dust of battle obliterates everything but the second syllable."

Think of that. So many players in the game of life get to first base. Some reach second. A handful make third. But how few there are who get home and score.

I once read these challenging words in a national magazine:

Above all, let's cut out the rotten excuse that we are only human. That we are entitled to some daily quota of error or indifference. Only human? What an incredible denial of the human potential. Only human? This is the ultimate insult.

Remember that man's greatness does not lie in perfection, but in striving for it.

My beloved young friends, keep faith with the best that is in you. Shakespeare said: "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

You did not come into the world to fail. You came into the world to succeed. You have accomplished much so far. It is only the beginning. As you move forward on the trail of life, keep the banner of faith in self ever before you. You may not be a genius. You may not be exceptionally smart. But you can be good and you can try. And you will be amazed at what might happen when in faith you take a step forward.

Never lose faith in yourself. Never lose faith in your capacity to do good and worthwhile things. You cannot be arrogant. You cannot be conceited. You can be quiet and humble, and forward looking and full of hope, the hope that blossoms into faith.

KEEP FAITH WITH YOUR ASSOCIATES

You will never be alone. In this world we work together to accomplish things. We marry and have companions. We have children. We have associates in the Church. We work with others in our daily pursuits.

Never lose faith in your opportunity to lift those who are in need, to give strength to those who are weak, to give encouragement to those who falter by the way.

You will have about you, throughout your lives, those who stumble and fall. You can lift them. Said Paul to the Romans, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak," and then he added these significant words, "and not to please ourselves." We have an obligation to assist one another, to build one another. Declared Jesus to Peter, "Simon... Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

The Lord has admonished us through revelation: "Wherefore, be faithful; stand in the office which I have appointed unto you; succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees."

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Keep faith with your associates. You can help them and they can help you. The Almighty has designed that we work together, that we assist one another, that we bless one another in our association.

In a complex and difficult operation the chief surgeon usually gets the credit. But in the operating room he must have faith in those about him if he is to be successful. His assistant doctors, the anesthesiologist, the skilled nurses who work with him—they are a team. He could never do it alone. Keep faith with your associates.

KEEP FAITH WITH THE CHURCH

This Church is the way of truth and life and salvation. I care not what course you may pursue in your future lives. I care not to what heights you may aspire. You will do better if you remain true to the faith of your forbears. Last Saturday I set apart the presidency of the new Lubbock Texas Temple. The president is a retired cardiologist, a good doctor who has saved the lives of many people. He has been a man of great skill and great learning and great service. The first counselor has been a dean in a large university, a man of learning and a man of capacity who has done very well. The second counselor is a government employee, and a man who has won the esteem of his associates and given great and distinguished public service. To me it is wonderful that while climbing upward in their various professions they have remained faithful and true Latter-day Saints. And now, to crown their lives of service comes a great and sacred opportunity to preside over a new temple, a House of the Lord, where they will administer ordinances in the authority of the holy priesthood whose power will reach beyond the veil of death.

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Be true to this Church. Keep faith with this glorious work which the God of heaven has restored to the earth in this the wondrous dispensation of the fullness of times. It is the Church of God the Eternal Father. It is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ whose name it bears. It is true, and I testify of that. It is wonderful, and I bear witness of that. Those who have gone before you have paid a terrible price for that which you have today. They have looked to you and hoped and prayed that you would be ever true to the cause which was so precious to them.

KEEP FAITH WITH GOD OUR ETERNAL FATHER AND THE RISEN LORD JESUS CHRIST

I have seen in my lifetime those who started out walking in the sunlight of faith. But gradually, through arrogance and conceit, through pride and a desire for the honors of men, they have turned their backs on God and forsaken Him. They have literally traded their birthright for a mess of pottage. They have thrown away that which was most precious

and substituted a hollow shell. Like the prodigal son who wasted his inheritance “with riotous living” until he would fain eat husks with the hogs, they have sought satisfaction in the husks of life. Their lives have become empty, unfulfilled. They have forsaken their God who gave them life, and their Redeemer who bought them with His blood.

Declared Jehovah to ancient Israel, “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

Keep that humility which will cause you to get on your knees in prayer, in acknowledgment of His power and goodness. He will not fail you. He will hear your prayers. He will answer your prayers. In the stillness of the night, you will hear the whisperings of His Spirit to direct you in your times of distress and need. Those times will come to you as they do to all. Keep faith with God and He will never let you down. He will never turn His back upon you. To you He has said: “Be still, and know that I am God.” And His Beloved Son has declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” There is none other to bless you as your Father in heaven and His divine Son will bless you.

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Faith of our fathers, holy faith,
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I lay upon you this charge, and invoke the blessings of heaven upon you as you leave this institution to go forward in other pursuits, that you walk with faith, with sure and certain faith, and may heaven smile upon you is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ☺