

Joy at Graduation

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My dear brothers and sisters, a commencement exercise is a happy time for graduates, for parents, for friends, for teachers, and for the administration. It is a time to celebrate past accomplishments and to certify graduates' progress from one status to another. For them, it is a rite of passage, like a christening, a baptismal service, a coming-out party, or a wedding reception.

But the gaining of knowledge and skills is an incomplete view of the significance of education. Of even greater importance is the question of how those attainments are to be used. That is the question sought to be answered by graduation speakers. Our function, as one has said, is "to hold you here long enough to let solemnity sink in."¹

I.

You graduate in challenging times: wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis, and the prospects of financial disasters. More important, values and standards honored for thousands of years are now being denied or cast aside. Selfishness is replacing

service. The fundamental freedoms of speech and religion are being questioned. Evil is being called good and good is being called evil.

Though men's hearts are failing them, you should take heart. There have always been challenging times. We, the generations of your predecessors, have survived daunting challenges, and so will you. The answer to all of these challenges is the same as it has always been. We have a Savior, and He has taught us what we should do. At the conclusion of His earthly ministry He declared: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

As His witness I testify that His teachings are true and that the way He has marked out is the way to peace in this world and everlasting life in the world to come.

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II.

Foremost among the things you should remember from your years at BYU are the teachings you have received about the things of eternity and the principles of right and wrong that have been up front in your religion classes and pervasive in many others.

At Brigham Young University we like to quote the teachings of the founder, President Brigham Young. He spoke as an extraordinarily wise leader and he also spoke as a prophet. He taught this about the purpose of education in the gospel of Jesus Christ:

*All our educational pursuits are in the service of God, for all these labors are to establish truth on the earth, and that we may increase in knowledge, wisdom, understanding in the power of faith and in the wisdom of God, that we may become fit subjects to dwell in a higher state of existence and intelligence than we now enjoy.*²

In teaching the Saints how to conduct their lives in harmony with the gospel in a world that pursues other values, Brigham Young said:

*The man or woman who enjoys the spirit of our religion has no trials; but the man or woman who tries to live according to the Gospel of the Son of God, and at the same time clings to the spirit of the world, has trials and sorrows acute and keen, and that, too, continually.*³

Truly, as the Savior taught, we cannot “serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24).

Brigham Young had an inclusive attitude toward his fellowmen that each of us should understand and emulate in a world in which many do not share our values:

*It has never altered my feelings towards individuals, as men or as women, whether they believe as I do or not. Can you live as neighbours with me? I can with you; and it is no particular concern of mine whether you believe with me or not.*⁴

He also said:

*Our religion . . . is adapted to the capacity of the whole human family. It does not send a portion of the people to howl in torment for ever and ever, but it reaches after the last son and daughter of Adam and Eve, and will pluck them from the prison, unlock the doors, and burst the bonds and bring forth every soul who will receive salvation.*⁵

Finally, you should of course remember the needed fraction of all you have learned here. But even more important, you should remember that those whose sacrifices have supported your education expect you to use that education in the service of your fellowmen and in furtherance of your own becoming what God created you to become.

III.

Father Lehi taught that the children of God exist “that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). That great truth is fundamental to our philosophy of life. The kind of joy referred to in the scriptures is not the happiness we experience in temporary rushes of pleasure, such as we enjoy in today’s recognitions. The joy that is the purpose of our existence is intense and enduring. We may properly say that it is eternal.

Where do we find our greatest joy? I suggest that it is in creativity—the process and feeling of creating something. Mothers have surely realized that kind of joy, and fathers too, though to a lesser extent—at least at the beginning.

Creativity in business or in a profession is the same for men and for women. I am not qualified to speak of the joys of creativity in establishing a business or in the practice of medicine or musicianship, but I have some idea of creativity in the practice of law. Much of the practice of law is repetitive drudgery, but there are moments of joy in a new insight or in producing a good piece of legal work, like a letter of opinion. I have also experienced joy in

various kinds of English composition as I have tried to express a thought or explain a principle as clearly and persuasively as possible.

You will recognize similar examples of the joy of creativity in other lines of work. Surely the process of cultivating living things and seeing them come to maturity and harvest creates joy in farmers and in teachers. There is also joy in writing or in creating a work of art or in a performance that brings one of these to life for an audience. And overarching all of these is the joy we experience in many forms of service to our fellowman, as Dr. Doty has explained so persuasively and has so effectively demonstrated in his life.

But all of these illustrations are only mortal or temporary examples of the joy of creativity. We have no assurance that most of the things that bring us joy in mortality will continue in the next life. The diploma you have received this day is but one example.

I believe that our greatest joy is found through the gospel of Jesus Christ, which explains our origin as spirits, the creation of the world, our purpose in mortality, and our destiny in eternity. Explanations of the plan of salvation often use the word *joy*. When the foundations of the world were laid, we spirits “shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). The announcement of the Savior’s birth was a message “of great joy” (Luke 2:10). His Atonement and Resurrection fill us “with great joy” (Alma 4:14). The love of God is described as “the most desirable above all things” and “the most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 11:22, 23). Finally, the Savior Himself described the experience of returning to dwell with God as a “fulness of joy” (3 Nephi 28:10; D&C 93:33).

The gospel’s assurance of a continued embodied existence after this life illuminates our understanding of the ultimate joy of creativity. A favorite illustration of that truth is the Lord’s great explanation that His work and His glory is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Surely

our greatest eternal joy will be in the creativity that lives beyond this mortal life and gives joy after the Resurrection and throughout all eternity. That is why, as God has revealed, “eternal life . . . is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7).

And so I come to this vital advice to you graduates: Treasure and enlarge your family connections. Cherish and use your opportunities for creativity in eternal marriage. And value your friendships and opportunities for service, for those efforts can also be eternal.

IV.

I conclude with an additional thought, which is important to all of us.

During His journey across Samaria, Jesus rested at Jacob’s well. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water from that deep well, He asked her for a drink. She marveled that a Jew would speak to a Samaritan. Jesus replied that if she knew who He was, she would ask Him for living water. Seeing that He had no implement to draw water, she questioned how He could obtain any water to give her.

Before we remind ourselves of His answer, we should note the similarity of this incident to our present circumstance. The Savior is in our midst, sometimes personally, frequently through His servants, and always by His Spirit. His power is such that He could obtain anything on this earth. He need not ask for water at the well, for tithes and offerings at the Church, or for service to His children. He asks us for these temporal things—just as He sought a drink from the woman at Jacob’s well—so He can bless us with something of far greater importance than what we give.

In answer to the Samaritan woman’s question, Jesus said:

*Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:
But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall
give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall*

give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. [John 4:13–14]

On this graduation day it is appropriate to think of your education and your degree as implements that can draw water from a deep well. You can use those implements to satisfy thirst and other earthly desires for yourself and those dependent upon you. On occasion they can also be used to provide earthly support for the Savior and His work and His servants. But we must never forget what the Savior told the Samaritan woman: “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again.” Only from Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of this world, can we obtain the living water whose partaker shall never thirst again, in whom it will be “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

Jesus taught us how to obtain the living water that springs up into eternal life. Even as we celebrate our ability to draw water from Jacob’s well or other mortal replenishments, we should remember that these other sources are insignificant in value beside what we can

obtain from Jesus’ teachings, His atoning sacrifice, His commandments, and the covenants we make with Him. Even as you value the mortal progress we celebrate this day, do not forget that eternal reality, of which I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. William H. McNeill, “Rites of Passage,” 347th convocation address, University of Chicago, 14 December 1973; published in *University of Chicago Record* 8 (1974): 39.

2. Brigham Young, “Remarks by President Brigham Young” (6 October 1870), *Deseret News*, Semi-Weekly, 25 October 1870, 2; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 317.

3. Brigham Young, *JD* 16:123; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents*, 262–63.

4. Brigham Young, *JD* 7:165; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents*, 219.

5. Brigham Young, *JD* 12:309; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents*, 292.