

“A Faithful Friend Is a Strong Defense”

JEFFREY R. HOLLAND AND PATRICIA T. HOLLAND

We hadn't been at this business long before we realized that this hour is not conducive to long sermons. So we'll save that for later in the year and give you short sermons today.

There is, however, one thing we need to work out before I get serious with you. It is this Steve and Marie business. Some of you who were here last year will remember that purely in good fun, as just a slightly lighter moment in our solemnities here, Sister Holland and I mentioned that we got escorted into a movie theater sort of “stride for stride” to the front of the hall with Steve Craig and Marie Osmond.

Well, that was—essentially—a true story, and I just shared it here for your consideration last year. I wanted you to know about our summer even as we asked about yours. Well, since then everyone has just taken it all so seriously, *especially* Steve and Marie. Before long I wanted to run out in the street and just say it was a story, a little BYU humor. But no, I run out into the street and see thousands of people backed up from the Hotel Utah Ballroom to Bryce Canyon waiting to get into their wedding reception. There they were—Steve and Marie, and all the Osmond Brothers and all the basketball team. There was in fact a marriage, and I had just been kidding, just warming up the BYU audience a little on your first day back to school. I feel so responsible!

But, for all that, we are available for a price. If you make it worth our while, I will tell a story about *your* courtship in this setting and perhaps you will make the cover of national magazines, and garden clubs all over America will discuss your trousseau and taffeta. Write your hopes on a Wheaties boxtop in 25 words or less, including the man or woman with whom you wish to be seen walking down a theater aisle. Sister Holland and I will take care of *everything* from there on.

(Now you just watch. Some wise guy is going to send me a Wheaties boxtop and a reservation schedule for the Hotel Utah Ballroom.) Speaking of strange guys, which of you is the young man I saw pulling into town with a surfboard sticking through the sunroof of your Volkswagen? I don't want to seem a spoilsport, but someone has seriously misled you about the size of the canal that runs past Heritage Halls.

I'd like Sister Holland to speak to you for a moment. I told you last year what her father thought of me. I didn't mention her mother.

Jeffrey R. Holland was president of Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 7 September 1982.

When Pat said so anxiously on our wedding day, “Now, Mother, I want this day to be perfect. I don’t want even the least significant detail overlooked.”

Her mother replied, “Oh, I’m sure Jeff will be there.”

Patricia T. Holland

When I was just sixteen years old, I came to Provo to spend the summer studying music on this campus. I lived in Helaman Halls, practiced in the basement of the Joseph Smith Building, and ate an enormous amount of pizza at what is now the Brick Oven on Eighth North and First East.

I’m afraid that at such a tender age I was much more interested in boys and what I should wear to the dance than anything of any real value or substance. But, something happened to me that summer. It was a major turning point in my life, and this campus has had deep personal meaning for me since that summer of 1958. I began to see and hear and feel things I’d never experienced before. It was like coming alive in a new dimension. Looking back then from this perspective, I now know that, because of this university setting, my mind was beginning to open to “the glory of God.” I was conscious perhaps for the first time of that relationship between his glory and his mind.

As I reflected on that special experience, while worrying and searching my heart for something of value to leave with you today, the scripture John 5:40 came to have bright, new meaning for me: “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”

What does he mean when he softly scolds, “Ye will *not* come to me, that ye might have life”? I don’t think he was just talking about life eternal (though that too). I think he was speaking about here and now—I think he was speaking about a constant feeling of well-being and of thanksgiving for our very existence—of being alive spiritually.

I think he was saying that we search every where else for it first. We search for it in the praise of men, in worldly treasure or wordly pleasures, in clothing, in dances, and in enormous amounts of pizza while all the time he is crying, “Come unto me and ye will have life.”

In our sixteen-year-old son Matt’s seminary class, the teacher was trying to explain that to be constantly nourished by the word of the Lord was as binding and sustaining of life as the umbilical cord between mother and child. The teacher then asked the class, “What tangible resource do we have that is equally sustaining to us?” (I’m sure the teacher was hoping the class would respond with scriptures, prayer, obedience and so forth.) Our son Matt, with his laid-back sense of humor, raised his hand and asked, “Could it be an angelical cord?”

As many a truth is said in jest, Matt’s analogy is the best I can think of to describe literally the life the Lord can give to us through a tie that is as firm and sustaining as we are willing to allow. It is something heavenly, even angelic, and it can turn darkness to light, and death to life.

Now what does this have to do with you here, eager this morning to start a new year of school at BYU? Since marriage, my husband and I have lived in many different places. We have studied at several institutions of higher learning—some of the best in this nation. However, never have we found one so rich, so fertile for finding God and finding ourselves as BYU. This university is a veritable banquet table laden with all that can sustain life, if you come to it hungry and thirsting for it.

My husband has had several occasions to speak around the country, and he has talked about our educational heritage and the values schools should uphold.

Did you know that the earliest statement of educational aim at Harvard University declared: “Everyone shall consider the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life”? All the nine colleges founded in the United States during the Colonial Period were sponsored by Christian churches. During the nineteenth century, however, education was becoming divorced from organized religion. It was then that the Latter-day Saints began this university, refusing to follow that national trend. As Elder George Q. Morris, a member of the Council of the Twelve, once said, “It is called the Brigham Young University, but it is the University

of the Kingdom of God" ("Church Doctrine," *Speeches of the Year* [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1955], p. 1). You see, you are the kingdom of God, here nurtured and tutored for your service in the world. John A. Widtsoe, who once served on the faculty of BYU and was later president of both Utah State and the University of Utah from which he was appointed to the Council of the Twelve, wrote:

*There are many institutions of learning which foster splendidly the learning gains of the centuries. But, there is only one offering full collegiate training, Brigham Young University, in which the wisdom of men is saturated and made alive with the wisdom of the gospel of Jesus Christ. ["Commencement Day at Brigham Young University," *Improvement Era*, July 1949, p. 449]*

I'm here to bear my witness to the truth that the wisdom of men and women on this campus—the knowledge of your faculty, staff, and administration—is saturated and made alive with the wisdom of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In order for you to taste all that they have to offer, you will have to keep your angelical cord secure. I would like you to know that the president of this university, for all his fun and good humor, spends hours and hours, night and day, laboring to know the mind and the will of the Lord and seeks diligently to help fulfill the destiny of this school and of the Church. He strives to hold firm the very principles I suggest for you.

In closing, may I just say to you very personally that there are a few truly irreplaceable, priceless experiences that you can have in this world. One of these for me is that the Lord has allowed me to give life to my own three children.

The love that I felt as I realized it was my body, my strength, my constant nourishment that was giving life to my children formed a bond that is like nothing else in this world—nothing else, that is, expect for that love our Father in Heaven extends to us. You see, once you've given life, you *never* stop giving to it. I have tried to give my children comfort when my own heart ached. I have tried to give encouragement when my own

life was confused, I have tried to give love when I knew it might not be returned.

Like every Mother, I have learned something of the link between "life" and "love." No wonder Nephi learned that the "tree of life" was literally the "love of God."

I love you very much, and I want your lives to be rich and full, not just this year, but always. May we all strengthen the cords that bind us to our Heavenly Father, who is always there to bless us, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jeffrey R. Holland

I would like my own remarks to be something of an extension of Sister Holland's. I, too, wish to speak with you about our life and love as a community, a community bound together with strong ties and common concerns. The quality of your life here—your happiness, your success, and your well-being—is constantly on my mind. Certainly it is as we start another school year together. Pat and I want you to be comfortable here. We want to know you and be friends with you and assist you in every way we can. We want you to succeed. We do love you very much.

Friend to Friend

Life at BYU is part of a rather large and important experiment in latter-day Christian living. It might even be considered a kind of United Order. Surely you are a select group, and, as with those pioneer experiments in communal living in Orderville, Brigham City, and elsewhere, we are terribly dependent upon each other. The idea is that we will live and work very closely together, each helping the other, and in the process nudge the whole institution just that much closer toward the ideal university BYU is intended to be, a university full of scholar/saints, young and old, who care very much about each other. We want BYU to be at least a little as heaven must be a lot. "Hell," on the other hand, said T. S. Eliot, "is oneself;/Hell is [experienced] alone. There is nothing to escape from and nothing to escape to. [In Hell] one is always along" (T. S. Eliot, "The Cocktail Party," act 1, scene 3).

Now except for those moments of solitude we all expect and wish for, I am anxious that no

one feel needlessly alone at BYU. And in the few minutes I have with you, I hope to suggest a meaning there that goes significantly beyond the disappointments of mere loneliness. I am reaching for a special meaning of friendship, and, to the extent that I have either a text or a title, it is taken from the Apocrypha “A faithful friend is a strong defense. And he that hath found . . . one hath found a treasure” (Ecclesiasticus 6:14).

I speak to you friend to friend.

David McNeice, Jr.

Last Saturday David McNeice, Jr., was buried. He was twenty-two. He had been married just three weeks. One week ago today he was standing in the Washington Street Station waiting for a Boston subway train to arrive when another man, screaming, abusive, and obviously drunk, entered the station, walked to the edge of the platform, and fell on to the tracks. Instantly—and I assume instinctively—twenty-two-year-old, newly married, responsible David McNeice jumped down on the track to help. At that instant, the train came out of the tunnel. McNeice frantically waved his arms, and then, as one observer described it to the press, “It was over so quickly.” Not surprisingly, the drunken, abusive, fallen man survived the experience quite nicely. As they buried David McNeice, everyone who knew this young couple called it so needlessly, selfishly senseless.

What does this have to do with the first day of school at BYU? Well, nothing really—then again maybe everything.

Virtues and Values

Sister Holland mentioned in her remarks some of the invitations I have had recently to speak and tell the BYU story. A rather constant theme in those public speeches has been our commitment to virtues and values, purposes that have always mattered at universities and in civilized societies—purposes that certainly matter at Brigham Young University. They include, among a host of other things, courage and honor, honesty and integrity. They include good taste, careful speech, and hard work. They include sensitivity and spirituality and appreciation for both art and

nature. They include a love of learning and a sense of progression and a sense of peace. They include an awareness of culture and tradition and history, especially history marking what time has shown to be the better way.

Why speak of such virtues and values?

Well, I for one happen to think BYU has a lot to say about them to a world that may be losing at least some of them. Furthermore, espousing them is part of what it means to be a Latter-day Saint. So for several of my first months here two years ago, I wrestled with what my highest personal tasks ought to be in relationship to those principles. I finally isolated four such tasks and made them the major goals of my administration. That next fall I went before the faculty and staff in our annual university conference and told them what my hopes were and why I thought BYU was a “pearl of great price,” a gem worth putting on national display.

I then shared at least the spirit of those ideas in this assembly with you last year and began in earnest to do all I could to accomplish just four things: (1) to encourage our quest for truth as a university of the first rank, (2) to reinforce our commitment to basic moral virtues as a university whose light must have a special glow, (3) to tell the BYU story wherever and whenever possible, and (4) to extend the special sense of community we have always felt here. Those were and are my four personal tasks as I see them as my part in the BYU mission.

Some things have worked well. Some things haven’t worked so well. And, of course, the task goes on. A lot of days have been very long. And a few nights have been pretty short. But I have loved it—deeply—and Sister Holland has loved it, and our children have loved it (within reason). And a lot of other friends on this campus have loved it and have done these things better and longer than the Hollands will ever be able to do them. But we believe in the task, have been blessed beyond measure, and are anxious to do a better job. And from time to time others around the country have expressed interest in our efforts. Nothing earthshaking because nothing very earthshaking was going on. But interest, often genuine interest, in

BYU's desire to be a very "good" university—and I intend that adjective to apply with every possible interpretation.

Disappointments

After two years of doing what little we were capable of—usually right here on campus but occasionally in some outside setting—the syndicated services of the *Los Angeles Times* chose to run a rather complimentary column on BYU's view of these matters of truth and virtue. Perhaps some of you saw it. That story appeared coast to coast last spring. The copy I saw appeared on April 21. Two days later, on commencement day, April 23, 1982, these stories appeared in a United Press International release disseminated at least as widely, even as we marched, robed and hooded, to our important graduation exercises. The various headlines read "Four 'Y' Students Charged with Fake Document Fraud" (*Provo Herald*, 22 April 1982), "[Y] Students Arraigned on [Driver] License Scam" (*Salt Lake Tribune*, 23 April 1982), and so on.

By referring to this incident, I do not want to cause anyone any more pain than too many have already felt. I do not use the names of the students involved, and I hope you don't even know the names. I would not embarrass them or their parents or any of you. That is not my purpose. Remember, I'm speaking friend to friend. But perhaps enough time has gone by that, at least in the abstract, we can use the lesson it offers us as a group of people who have chosen to live together for a time.

"Virtus et Veritas"? Was the "falsifying of government documents . . . in connection with a highly sophisticated driver license forgery scam operating out of one of the [university's dormitories]" (*Tribune*)—I am quoting directly the precise language of the wire services—was that either "virtuous" or "truthful"? Oh, there's a Latin phrase for it, but it isn't "Virtus et Veritas." And what of the sixty-seven individuals known to have ordered the false identification documents, showing those in possession to be twenty-one years of age when they were not? What need would exist for sixty-seven students on this campus to own a fake ID? Is it that tough ticket taker at the Varsity

Theater? Is it the stern dispenser of "Y Sparkle" at the Cougar Eat? My gosh, if a Y student's life is getting that tough then maybe we all ought to get fake ID's. Perhaps it is the new football stadium—are there no seats for anyone under twenty-one? For students admitted here on their honor I can't imagine any other reasons for needing to appear twenty-one.

And what of the rest of the students in those rooms and in those halls and on those floors and in and out of that dormitory? Was everyone's education yet so paltry that none had *ever* heard Edmund Burke's telling dictum, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men [or women] to do nothing" (Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, 23 April 1770)? Did anyone within forty-five miles of Hinckley Hall have any pangs of guilt or any whisper of conscience, knowing that a felony was being committed in facilities paid for and maintained by tithing dollars of widows and fatherless? And there we sat in another commencement exercise, speaking of truth and virtue. It is no wonder to me God once said to ancient Israel, "I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies" (Amos 5:21).

Let me cite one other disappointment and then leave this whole subject. (I don't like it any better than you do.) Sometime during our life together last year a very angry and disappointed father called me about his daughter's off-campus living situation. She had at least one roommate who apparently thought her boyfriend should be entitled to spend the night on the couch whenever the evening's weariness overtook him—and apparently most evenings he was "overtaken." After all, there was nothing really wrong going on. It was a little inconvenient in an apartment of girls, but there were walls and doors and robes, and he could be left pretty much alone. Well, I say to this Rip Van Winkle of Raintree or Riviera or wherever, and to his girlfriend and to her roommates—men do not sleep in women's apartments if either said man *or* woman wants to remain at Brigham Young University. Not on the couch, not in the kitchen, not on the floor, not entwined around five-gallon cans containing the next year's supply

of whole wheat. No one has to be a 4.0 student to understand that, including the roommates who put up with it.

A Covenant Society

I speak of those unsavory issues not to sensationalize mistakes or to rule out the repentance that every one of us will need to call upon forever. I think if this had not been so recent and so devastating to me, I certainly would not choose to begin a new year's greeting to you this way. I am not pointing publicly at individual people and certainly am not inviting you to. But what I do want to stress on this very first day of the new school year is the nature of the covenant society we form when we come to BYU, that we have a right to hope for when we enroll here—that is, among faculty, staff, students, and administrators. We are, at least by the world's standards, "Separatists," just as those earliest Pilgrims were, sailing aboard our own *Mayflower* and determined to live a better way. Like them, we too feel we are on "God's errand in the wilderness." On the eleventh of November, 1620, when that first courageous little band touched land at Cape Cod, they—like us—signed a compact "for the glory of God, the advancement of the Christian faith, and the general good of the Colony" (William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*). Every social or political experiment in history has had some such code or compact or constitution—written or implied, Christian or otherwise—upon which it has depended for its very survival. We have one at BYU.

The success of our BYU experiment—like that of those first New Englanders—requires the best effort of everyone whose name is on the parchment. Ben Franklin said it best to the signers of the Declaration 150 years later. "We must all hang together," he said to his colonial friends, "or assuredly we shall all hang separately." The success we dream of here will take the best effort of all who come. It will never work otherwise, at least not fully and not well. It won't require abrasiveness or smugness of self-righteousness, but it will require integrity and it will require work.

Is every Christian expected to bear witness? A man content to bear no witness to the truth is not in the kingdom of heaven. One who believes must bear witness. One who sees the truth must live witnessing to it. Is our life then a witnessing to the truth? Do we carry ourselves in bank, on farm, in house or shop, in study or chamber of workshop, as the Lord would, or as the Lord would not? Are we careful to be true, or are we mean, self-serving, world-flattering, fawning slaves? When contempt is cast on the truth, do we smile? [When the truth is] wronged in our presence, do we make no sign that we hold by it?

*I do not say we are called upon to dispute and defend [against falsehood] with logic and argument, but we are called upon to show that we are on the other side. . . . The soul that loves the truth and tries to be true will know when to speak and when to be silent. But the true man will never look as if he did not care. We are not bound to say all that we think, but we are bound not even to look [like] what we do not think. [George MacDonald, *Creation in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1976), p. 142]*

In the kind of Christian community we anxiously pursue, we must not even look like what we do not think or believe. And we must never look as if we did not care. That is why we make gentle reminders about dress and grooming. Every year at the start of school I see just a few, a very few, who have "grubby" or immodest clothing or hair that is not trimmed or groomed, and I think, "We have failed to help them understand what we are about at BYU." It is a part, however small, of the mission we have, the witness we bear, the colony we're creating. It is part of governing ourselves once correct principles have been taught and understood. And it is important in far more significant ways than dress and grooming, in far more private arenas of our lives.

Mutual Responsibility

This reminder is, of course, directly applicable to all of us—beginning with the president of the university. If I robbed a bank this afternoon, or, worse yet for you, embezzled the university's operating funds, would I be the only one

punished? I might be the only one to get a jail sentence, but *you* would be the ones punished. You and my wife and my children and my colleagues—all of you would bear part of that shame and burden. BYU and the LDS Church would be severely punished, at least in the public mind, for many years to come.

That's unfair, you say, but what is fair about the death of David McNeice, Jr.? You see we are all, in a sense, waiting at the same station together. We each have our own hopes and plans and dreams. But by virtue of our enrolling at BYU we have stated our basic agreement as to which train we will ride and what special rules of conduct we will obey as passengers. Of course, one drunk can stagger into our station and right off the platform, bringing needless, heartrending—and unfair—tragedy to his “friends” (never his “enemies”—his enemies would have left him on the track) almost before the trip has even begun. But the risk David McNeice took is a risk we must run in a Christian community.

Should a faculty member at BYU then write or say or teach or publish anything he or she wants and assume that's done without any impact upon colleagues in that department or college or the university as a whole? Maybe that intellectual isolation exists at some university, but not at BYU. Can a manager on our staff be free with his ledgers or supplies or cash or contracts and believe that he alone runs the risk of exposure? Maybe somewhere but not at BYU. So it ought not to be any great surprise that we have expectations for you as students, as well. There are no victimless crimes here. We do, in at least some very fundamental ways, “hold all things in common” as did the Saints of old. Ask not for whom the Y bell tolls. It tolls for thee.

You don't really need here today an introduction to Political Philosophy 101, and I am certainly not the one to teach it, but consider this early observation attributed to Socrates by Plato:

Mankind at first lived dispersed, and there were no cities [read “universities” if you wish]. But the consequence was that they were destroyed by the wild beasts, for they were utterly weak in comparison of

*them, and their art was only sufficient to provide them with the means of life, and did not enable them to carry on war against the animals: food they had, but not as yet the art of government, of which the art of [defense] is a part. After a while the desire of self-preservation gathered them into cities [universities] but when they were gathered together, having no art of government, they evil intreated one another, and were again in process of dispersion and destruction. Zeus feared that the entire race would be exterminated, and so he sent Hermes to them, bearing reverence and justice to be the ordering principles of cities and the bonds of friendship and conciliation. [Plato, *Protagoras*; emphasis mine]*

Well, Zeus may not have sent Hermes, but Brigham Young did send Karl G. Maeser that we might learn to live together “in the bonds of friendship and conciliation.” Whether out of a “desire for self-preservation” like the Greeks, or “for the general good of the Colony” noted by the Pilgrims, part of our education is to learn to live wisely and responsibly together. Hell *is* being alone and self-centered and untrue. If enough understood that soon enough, and thus cherished rather than chafed under the human bonds that must be formed, the whole world could be saved in something of a celestial colony, both here in time and in eternity.

The Best That Lies Within

Many of you—indeed most of you—make BYU just such a community of friends even now. I reluctantly speak of two or three or even sixty-seven who have problems during a year because I do so with full realization that more than 25,000 of you are contributing to the common good at BYU and are, for the tasks at hand, as heroic in your way as David McNeice was at that train station. I think no students anywhere in the world live more responsible and exemplary lives than do you at BYU. I salute you with all my heart. And you who are new today become part of a rare and priceless tradition.

We began by singing the school song. The words to that song were written by an early student at BYU, Annie Pike Greenwood. In 1909, as a

nonmember of the Church, she also wrote something else—a brief testimonial in response to one of her friends who had remarked, “I think they must have spoiled you at that Brigham Young Academy.” Reflecting on that comment Annie wrote,

*It struck me forcibly that he was right. “They” had certainly spoiled me at “that Brigham Young Academy”—spoiled me as mother spoils her child—with kindness, encouragements, appreciation, charity—spoiled me so that I can never be content to take anything but the best the world has to give nor satisfied to give anything but the best that lies within me. By day and by night it comes upon me that I must fulfill all of which my teachers believed me capable.” [Ernest L. Wilkinson and W. Cleon Skousen, *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1976), pp. 194–95]*

What is the best that lies within us? Of how much are we capable? None of us yet knows, but that is why we have come to BYU. An old Arabic legend tells of a rider finding a spindly sparrow lying on its back in the middle of the road. He dismounted and asked the sparrow why his feet were in the air.

Replied the sparrow, “I heard the heavens were going to fall today.”

“And I suppose you think your puny bird legs can hold up the whole universe?” laughed the horseman.

“Perhaps not,” said the sparrow with conviction, “but one does whatever one can.”

In my appreciation for you I suppose it is only fair to note that some of you probably do “whatever you can” in ways we might not fully encourage. President Dallin Oaks told me of an experience early in his administration. A prominent visitor to the campus was being hosted at a luncheon in the Wilkinson Center when he excused himself to visit the men’s room. When the visitor returned, he looked dark and said with a tone of disappointment, “Well, I’ve discovered you Mormons are just like everybody else. When I go to a public restroom, I usually find things written on the walls, and BYU is no exception.”

His totally abashed BYU hosts immediately tried to extend an apology, however lame, but as they stammered and stuttered, he burst out laughing. “Don’t worry, it was confined to just one bold, handwritten word: REPENT.”

Perhaps the author of that was the fellow with the surfboard.

You have all come to BYU “for the general good of the Colony,” and you make it a wonderful place to be. Sister Holland and I love you with all our hearts for that gift. I said at the outset that I wanted to speak of friendship in a way that transcended mere companionship. We do not want you to be lonely here, but more than that we do not want you to be false.

*Of all who will one day stand in dismay and sickness of heart, with the consciousness that their very existence is a shame, those will fare the worst who have been consciously false to their [friends]; who, pretending friendship, have used their neighbor to their own ends; and especially those who, pretending friendship, have divided friends. To such Dante has given the lowest [circle in] Hell. If there be one thing God hates, it must be treachery. [MacDonald, *Creation in Christ*, p. 230]*

I ask you to care for each other the way the David McNeices of the world care. Don’t play the part of the drunk. Leave BYU months or years from now better than you found it. Study hard. Make every semester count. Like little Annie Greenwood, give the best that lies within you. It is no easy task or convenient colonial duty. It will require much from you, and faithful friends will be a strong defense, I love you and welcome you back to school. “Ye are my friends,” Jesus said to his disciples, and with his own life gave them the love than which, he said, there is no greater. “Ye are my friends,” he said, “if ye do whatsoever I command you. . . . These things I command you, that ye love one another” (John 15:14, 17).

May this be the best—and friendliest—year of our lives, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.