

“Are You True?”

JEFFREY R. HOLLAND

Thank you very, very much. The grave will be dedicated at about three o'clock. Of course, not all of you can make it, but. . . . She does not know I'm going to do this, but need my wife, Pat, to come up here with me. (I told the freshman young men on Friday that if they studied really, really hard, this is what they got at BYU.) I'd like her to share with you a few of her thoughts this morning, if you would.

Sister Patricia T. Holland

He promised me he would never do this to me, and he may be the first president to start his new administration with a black eye.

I told the new freshmen a couple of days ago that a little less than a hundred years ago, I was a new student here, facing all of the challenges, trying to find the right buildings, and wondering if I'd succeed. Now, for some reason, I'm feeling all those feelings again. I guess the only thing that's redeeming about my experience this time is that I do feel we were called by a prophet and thus by our Heavenly Father to serve you in this capacity. We have been blessed with a small family, and I'm grateful that the Lord would extend my family to include all of you. I feel like I now finally have my quiver full, and I want you to know and I want my Heavenly Father to know that

I will serve you, that I will serve him, and that I will support and sustain my husband in his calling.

I have a testimony that the gospel is true, that this is the Savior's university, and that he will bless all of you who are willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary to be all that he would have you be. And I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Jeffrey R. Holland

Thank you sweetheart. You're going to see a lot of her, for we want to approach this task together. We believe that says something about what this Church believes in and what this school stands for, and I'm grateful to have her at my side. You have now learned what you would have learned anyway—that this is a different sort of devotional. I hope there will be an opportunity later in the year to do just something slightly more traditional, to take a scripture or an idea or a need and to discuss it in the way that I was able to do with some of you last spring. But today's assembly is different, and

Jeffrey R. Holland was president of Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 2 September 1980.

I hope you will understand that and bear with me. It's the first day of school, and of necessity some business devolves on the shoulders of the president. However, I do want to make it clear at the outset that I know why you are here. I didn't just fall off the turnip truck. I know quite a bit about you. Some eager young man comes in from concourse F and says, "Hey, Smitty, she's here." To which Smitty replies, "Yeah, and she's with Jonesey." But I'm glad to have you here under any circumstance, and if I can insert something of worth along the way, I'll be grateful.

Everyone has been new to this campus at one time or another—many of you are new here this morning—and I just want to reaffirm what Pat has said, that we do know how you feel. Yes, you will get registration worked out. And yes, there are exits from the Harris Fine Arts Building. We do have some folks lost over there: they're in the "E over P1R2 wing" of the southeast quadrant, and if you see them, you should leave them lunch money. To the young women in the audience we say, "Yes, there are enough young men to go around." However, you will soon find that to be part of the problem—they just keep "going around."

I recently passed a coed who was just furious. Her face was red, white, and blue—all at once. Sort of the Francis Scott Key of Heritage Halls, I suppose. I watched as she stormed into her apartment and slammed the door, shrieking, so that I could hear out on the street, "Men are all alike!!" I tried to guess her home town (I've been trying to do that with people), and I suspected maybe she was from Santaquin. But then from across the way came a sweet little melodic voice, replying, "Well men are all I like, too." I think she's from Atlanta, but I'm not sure.

And, of course, you will all look forward, married folks aside, to your first computer-arranged date. That will be your foreshadowing of the final judgment, for there you will

stand face to face with exactly what you deserve.

There are many things that I would like to say to you today. I wish we could just visit privately and that you could ask me what a president feels about BYU and I could ask you how a student feels about BYU. Maybe sometime, someplace, we can do that. I would very much like to. But it probably can't be done here this morning.

It is customary, in this first assembly, for the president of the university to say something of what is expected of the students. Included in that is, almost routinely, some statement about such matters as dress and grooming. That is not my favorite topic, and I suspect it is not yours. (May I just commend you because I have been deeply impressed with and immensely grateful for how spectacularly good you look. And I'm a little chagrined to take the time of so many to address an issue that apparently is needed by so few.) But I would like to say something about why standards are important in the context of issues much larger than dress and grooming themselves. I'm not here this morning with a micrometer or a fabric gauge; I just want to talk about a principle. I might add that I have thought of not saying anything about this subject, which would break a long-standing tradition. But I worried about that inasmuch as this is my first devotional with you, and I feared that what I would not say would somehow ring louder in your ears than anything I would say, which might have implied a message I would not want to convey. So, without rehearsing the legal code of the Medes and the Persians or checking all the dietary restrictions in Leviticus, I do want to discuss a principle that explains why we have standards at this university. And at that point, I will leave it to you for the rest of the year.

Coincidentally, without any prompting from me, President Kerr mentioned twice in his prayer the mission of this school. BYU is

a school with a mission. It has been “called,” if you will, by prophets past and present, to accept a certain assignment, or mission, in the kingdom. In terms of the Church Educational System it is a mission that, at least at present, no other university can fulfill. This special mission, like other missionary service, has its course of action outlined in the scriptures and is reiterated by those called to preside over this university. The fact that our Board of Trustees is made up of the presiding authorities of the Church, including the First Presidency, adds to the sense of mission we feel here. Now you should understand that our call is essentially an academic one, so be prepared when we expect you to take your education seriously. But the mission of BYU has spiritual and religious implications, too, as any church educational experience should have and as almost all educational experiences anywhere once had. As David Reisman recently said, “We live within the secular cathedrals of higher learning but in the absence of the conviction which built those cathedrals.” But that is a talk for another day.

As I have traveled throughout the Church and as I have been invited to sit in council settings at the invitation of some of the Brethren, it has been my impression that almost everyone in the Church— from President Kimball to the most distantly located member of this Church—understands something of and believes something of whatever it is we call the mission of Brigham Young University. They speak of BYU as a school with a destiny; they speak of it as a special education in our time; they speak of it as the Lord’s university. President Kimball himself speaks of the “education for eternity” that he hopes will be offered here.

So BYU is, by definition, a school of extraordinary expectation, a school with a mission, if you will, and those who come here—you and I—are missionaries. Now don’t pull out the white shirts and the ten-speeds just yet: isn’t

that particular kind of mission right now. But we are missionaries nevertheless. And certain expectations are always part of fulfilling an honorable mission. Now we give you considerably more latitude here than does the MTC. (You are, for example, allowed to date once a year.) But there are nevertheless rules and regulations and standards.

For example, each of you has received a brochure entitled *A Style of Our Own*, the title of which comes from President Kimball himself (and you should understand that). It is part of the missionary handbook, if you will, for students attending BYU. You have it. We invite—and expect—you to abide by it as you help to fulfill the mission of the school. The general theme of it is simply that campus attire and grooming of both men and women will be neat and clean and representative of a certain standard of appearance that the university is “called”—and I use that word advisedly—to maintain. Now I suspect that this won’t be the case, but if there is in this congregation someone whose dress or grooming or behavior doesn’t comply, then we ask you to adjust accordingly. That’s why it’s important to say this the first day of school so we don’t have to say it ever again. We ask that not because we don’t love you just as much in bib overalls. That has nothing to do with it, at least not initially. What it does have something to do with is the mission of BYU.

I suppose a full-time missionary could teach a discussion reasonably well in faded Levi’s, a p.e. t-shirt, and thongs. But President Kimball and the Brethren have said no to that, and wisely so, I believe, because, to borrow from Mr. McLuhan, “the medium is the message.” Mr. and Mrs. Brown or Mr. and Mrs. Garcia hearing the message of the gospel for the first time, want to feel something besides the experience of Joseph Smith in the grove. They want to know, among other things, what dignity and what standard and what behavior that great truth has then instilled in this

Church. So we try very hard not to detract from a discussion of the First Vision by having missionaries tell of it in something other than faded Levi's, a p.e. t-shirt, and thongs. Indeed, in the very waters of baptism, into which we hope to take Mr. and Mrs. Brown or Mr. and Mrs. Garcia, we dress in a certain way, not because other clothing would not work but because the right clothing becomes a part of the very ordinance itself.

In that same spirit, some of you will remember Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone saying on this campus that he would not give his own children a priesthood blessing—even in the middle of the night—without first putting on his suit and a shirt and a tie. It isn't, I suppose, that the priesthood wouldn't work without that. It obviously has. But rather this is something Elder Featherstone feels and wants his children to feel about the image and dignity and power of the priesthood.

In its own way, so it is with dress and grooming standards on this campus. There is a great deal of freedom here. We want you to be happy and to be comfortable. But please do not think that you should be able to dress sloppily or immodestly here or to wear your hair untrimmed or uncombed just because you did so at your former high school or at some other university. The great secret I want to share with you this morning is that this isn't your former high school or any other university. It is a school with a mission, a mission it has been called to by prophets, and we want the medium, which is you and me and everyone here, to be representative of the message. That is the agreement we made in coming here.

Now that's considerably more than I wished to say about dress and grooming. I'm grateful that you would listen; it seemed to me important to say it in my first devotional address as president of this university. There are so many other things that I want to say and hope to have a chance to say as the year goes on. Because you are adults you will

understand our urgency in this matter and will furthermore understand the metaphor of the mission. You will not always be here, and you will not always need to worry about these regulations. But I believe with all my heart, as last week's *Newsweek* might have indicated, that in some sense the eyes of the world are indeed upon us, and now is a time for us to continue to make a statement about what BYU is and why it insists on being so. Thank you for helping me reaffirm in a new administrative term the unique part this school plays in the larger rendezvous with destiny that our sponsoring Church unflinchingly pursues.

I noted earlier in the introduction that this matter of standards is part of a larger issue, an academic issue as well as a behavioral one. Let me reinforce that. You surely could wear the cleanest clothes in town and keep the best groomed hair in the class, but if you do not invest your heart and soul in this opportunity for an education, then this university has failed in a more serious way in its mission. The only ultimate justification for BYU is that those who come here leave superbly educated. There are less expensive ways to hold Young Adult conferences. There are less expensive ways to have pizza parties. There are less expensive ways to meet new friends and play a little tennis. We have paid too much for this school if you and I don't leave here with a first rate education. If we haven't learned how to study, if we haven't learned how to write, if we haven't learned how to comb the library or use a laboratory, then we've paid too much of someone else's money for BYU. This is the far more important part of the "Mission Speech." You are called to get all you can from this educational experience. You will carry your block "Y" into the world as you leave here. For your sake and for the Church's sake, which pays for so much of your opportunity here, make that a good impression and a substantial contribution. Then the fun and the fascination that are so much a part of BYU will be appropriate icing

on the cake. I like tennis and I like pizza. We would not have you miss anything that is wholesome and worthwhile here. You can get it all if you decide now to study first and play later. The alternative is, as so many come to learn, to play now and study never. I ask you to work hard and to work early. You'll be surprised at how much time you then have at your disposal. If you loaf early and try to work late, you'll be surprised at how much of your time has gone down the disposal.

Let me give you a personal example that probably won't mean much to you, but it does to me because it was my life. Following my undergraduate years and one year of graduate work, earning a master's degree at BYU, I taught for two or three years trying to save up enough money for further graduate work. I was married and we had our first child, so I knew that even with a fellowship it would be tight. During the summers of those teaching years, I took courses at local universities, filling in some gaps in my undergraduate education and strengthening my preparation for the graduate field I had chosen.

One summer in Seattle I was taking a class that was particularly demanding. I wasn't exactly ecstatic over the teacher, and the material he used in the course seemed uneven and often unwisely chosen. But I jumped in and tried to ride the waves as best I could.

Just as a major midterm paper was coming due, my parents called and said they were coming to visit us. That was, of course, wonderful news. We needed a shot in the arm from our parents just as you do from yours. They had never been to the Northwest, and we wanted to show them everything. However, time was going to be a bit of a problem. I was teaching a full summer schedule and taking this class on the side. And like the iceberg and the Titanic in Thomas Hardy's poem, my parents and this paper converged upon me at exactly the same moment. Now there's no sense even discussing which option was most

attractive to me. We had not seen my parents in more than eighteen months, and I've already told you how I felt about the class. Furthermore, the class was an optional thing I was doing. After all, this wasn't the university at which I would be doing my graduate work, and certainly no one but I cared whether I did well in the class or not.

Well, as fate would have it, my parents arrived on a Friday, and my paper was due the next Monday. I had had the good sense to go to work on it reasonably early, so it wasn't as though I had to do it all over one weekend. (I had tried that at BYU and found that it didn't work very well.) So I had the paper virtually complete, except for one thing. I didn't like it. It wasn't right. I had to work more on it.

We set everything aside that Friday night and had a great time. My wife made tacos and enchiladas, the art for which my father said he would have banned me from the house had I not married her. We laughed and talked and had great fun. And then I had a decision to make. It was a kind of a missionary decision, if you will.

Saturday was a natural day to get up early, drive a couple of hours into British Columbia, meander back down the coast along the Puget Sound, and end up at the Seattle Center to enjoy all the remnants of the World's Fair. That would leave Sunday for my duties as a bishop and then most of Monday to visit some other spots before they left Tuesday to see my brother in California. That just posed one problem. My paper.

Now I ask you to remember that this was not life-and-death, or at least it did not seem so to me. For all intents and purposes, I could have caved in on the course, and no one would have cared. But that somehow did not seem right to me. I was plagued, if you will, with "missionary feelings." So I made a deal with my parents. If they would do all that I had outlined for Saturday with my wife, Pat, and our son, Matt, who was then two, but minus me,

I would have my paper completely finished for the rest of their stay plus the promise of barbecued steak, tossed green salad, garlic bread and baked potatoes by the time they got back. With one proviso, of course—that my Dad leave me enough money to buy the steak.

Well, they were disappointed, and so was I, but it seemed the best thing to do. So they played and I worked. I wrote and rewrote and shouted and tore up papers and punched the typewriter and rewrote. It didn't go as smoothly as I had hoped, but it went. I finally got it into what seemed reasonably acceptable shape and then threw myself (figuratively, of course) into the tossed green salad. Dad had left a dollar or two, Pat had found some steaks at the store, and I had started the coals on the grill, using part of the fury I was feeling over a paragraph that wouldn't work. But the paper was finished and the food was on the table when they returned.

Now that isn't much of a story except that it has made a great deal of difference in my life. When I got that paper back from a teacher I didn't like much in a course I didn't particularly enjoy, the professor had written just five words. I think it was all he had said to me during the entire term. "Publishable paper. See me sometime." Well, the aftermath doesn't really matter either except to say that this professor turned out to be, by sheer coincidence I suppose, a very close friend of a faculty member in my intended department at Yale. And then one thing led to another, and he wrote a note, saying, in effect, "You may want to consider this chap even if you haven't heard of St. George, Utah." There were other contacts along the way and other blessings that came, but my point is, again, sort of a missionary point. With that paper that summer in a remote setting—remote at least in terms of my ultimate plans—it made all the difference in the world for me to tract just one more door before calling it a day. To have done otherwise certainly would have been understandable and certainly would

have been more enjoyable. But it has made a wonderful difference in my life to have demanded just a bit more of myself on that occasion.

Forgive me if I see this experience as being in the same category as modest dress and attractive grooming and honesty on an exam, but I do. It is something better than average effort, it is something a little harder than par, it is something more rewarding in the long run. I ask you—for your sake and for the untold future you now only dream of—to work hard, work early, be honest, knock on one more door before quitting, stand out in the crowd through extra effort and personal commitment.

Some time ago I was invited to speak at a youth conference, which is the kind of invitation that I have had to decline routinely for years. But something about this one kept gnawing at me, and I answered that I would come. It seemed a foolish thing to do. It meant a morning drive of about four hours into a neighboring state and then the same drive back that night. But I felt I should go, and I did. I put my wife and children in the car with sandwiches and a Scrabble board, and off we went.

After I dropped them off at the local city park and swimming pool, I went over to the youth conference held at a local stake center. The trip was worth it all to me for one brief testimony that I heard there. At this very moment I honestly cannot tell you what I said to that group as their invited speaker. It's gone from my memory and undoubtedly gone from all of theirs. But this young convert's testimony is still with me, and I leave it with you today.

She described her conversion to the Church and what the gospel of Jesus Christ had come to mean in her life. Her home life was something out of a horror story—broken marriage, mother living with a man not her husband, brother on drugs, sister expecting a baby. It was as bizarre as any social worker would ever need to see. But into her life had come the Church, and for this young fourteen- or fifteen-

year-old girl it was everything, and she was hanging on. She described opening her school locker one day, only to have her paperback edition of the Book of Mormon fall to the floor. She used it in seminary, and to her it was a prized possession. She was still a little insecure about all of this, however, for the world around her had made her pretty insecure. And she was not yet certain what her new faith and friends held in store for her. She was happy but still tentative and very anxious to be stronger in the faith. She was embarrassed. She had not wanted anyone to see the book.

She hastily stooped down to pick it up before someone noticed. But someone had noticed, and they were standing right next to her. Three girls looked first at the book and then at her. Her heart sank, and she clutched at the little blue paperback cover. She said nothing, and neither did they for a moment. But then one of them asked, "Is that a church book?"

She said "Yes."

The other girl said "What church is it?"

And my young friend stuttered, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

"Is that the Mormons?" shot back the inquirer.

"Yes," whispered the frightened little Latter-day Saint, "that's the Mormons."

There was a long pause, and then her interrogator said, "Are you true?"

After a pause that was both instantaneous and eternal, my little friend said, with her head slightly more erect and her back slightly straighter and her hands trembling a little less, "Yes, I'm true."

I must confess that when I first heard that young girl's testimony, I did not quite understand all that I was hearing. I've thought about it since, and obviously what the one girl, in her own way, was asking was, "Are you active?" That's the way we would have phrased it. But what a tragic loss to so phrase it. How much more meaning there is in the straightforward inquiry, "Are you true?"

There was no reprisal. The heretofore undisclosed copy of the Book of Mormon in a school locker had not brought on physical torture or social ostracism. A little confidence came, and a little conviction increased. There was just one young soul saying to another, "Are you true?" "If you are a Latter-day Saint, are you a good one?"

My beloved brothers and sisters, I testify to you this morning that the questions are no longer, "Is the Church true?"; "Is God true?"; "Is Christ or Joseph Smith or Spencer W. Kimball true?" All of that and a lot more was decided a long, long time ago. It is not now subject to popular ballot, yours or mine. In a word, all that remains for you and for me, if we are to have a marvelous year at this university, is the simple inquiry, "Are you true?" May God bless us always to so be, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.