

August 2010 Convocation
Bruce L. Christensen

Thanks Dean Jones, it is a pleasure, and an honor and privilege to be here this morning and a particular privilege to be here to receive the Franklin S. Harris award. This is a remarkable institution. As I look out at the faces who made this possible and the graduates who are seated behind me. Not only that, but how possible it is do those things they have been able to do. I'm going to speak from notes this morning instead of from scripted text.

I have been fortunate throughout my career to have been in the right place at the right time. Stephen has talked a little about things I have been able to do. My wife simply says that I couldn't keep a job. We moved from place to place and she always was willing to pack up and be on our way to the next great adventure.

It's not that I have been able to do so many wonderful things, but that I've learned that I was in the right place at the right time because someone else, a loving and kind Heavenly Father, had things for me to do. It was always an honor to be able to serve Him in the things that are available.

I have lived long enough to have earned the honorable title of "geezer," and as such, I have collected lots of stories. As I thought of all the things I wanted to say, and should be said to the graduates this morning, there are two things that stood out. Let me give you a summary of the highlights and then I will talk about each of them in a little better detail.

An educated person has gifts to share. Because our students now have diplomas, just like the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*, they also have proof that they have a brain. It will now be up to them to use that brain often and wisely. Gratitude is the greatest of virtues. We need to practice it diligently throughout our lives. We need to treat people as people and not as objects. We need to seek the other side of the pancake. We shouldn't confuse the importance of our title or position with who we really are. And finally, happiness is found in service to others, not in possessions, power, or prestige.

An Educated Person

Let me talk a little about an educated person. D&C 46 teaches that everyone has a gift. All of these gifts are given that the entire community may be benefitted. Each of our graduates has a gift, and I encourage them to use those gifts because the education they receive will add value over time to the gifts that are theirs. They need to use those gifts wisely, and for those who are in the arts, they have a unique opportunity to provide the world with what I call, "peak aesthetic experiences."

When I went to the University of Utah, and took my first music appreciation class from R. Dean Watts, we were sitting in what is now Gardner Hall at the top of that building on a hot spring afternoon. The window was open, and the breeze was blowing, and Professor Watts played for us Dvorak's Ninth Symphony, titled "From the New World." As I listened to that music, I realized that tears were falling down my cheeks and I couldn't understand why. But that music was perhaps the most beautiful thing I had ever heard. It was a peak aesthetic experience for me.

I remember going to Rome for the first time and visiting a cathedral, called St. Peter in Chains. In that cathedral, there is a statue of Moses carved by Michelangelo. Moses is seated and he has the Ten Commandments nestled in his arms. You can see the muscles in his forearms as he is holding these heavy tablets.

He is looking off into the distance at the Children of Israel as they are worshipping the golden calf. You can see the features on his face – the frown, and the fierce anger that Moses feels, as well as the tension in his arms and upright body as he sits before you. It is an odd statue because it has horns.

In the Catholic version of the Bible, it says that as Moses looked from Mount Sinai, he had horns. The colloquialisms signify them to mean jealousy. Michelangelo put the horns on Moses indicating the jealousy, anger, and frustration that the Children of Israel were worshipping another God. But the statue looks so real that it could speak to you, and it does speak to you. It tells you of the fierce anger that Moses felt: the betrayal, the sadness, and the power of all those emotions in that statue. In fact the story goes that when Michelangelo finished the statue, he stepped back, looked at it, threw his hammer at it, and said “Speak!” because it looked so real. It is another peak aesthetic experience; something that talks to you directly and gives you the feeling and meaning of what that statue felt.

I remember going to my first play of King Lear, and being/feeling the anguish and sadness. Feeling the foolishness of this old man as he realizes that he has valued the wrong traits in his children, and again, providing that emotional turmoil, that anguish, that shared emotion, giving yet another peak aesthetic experience.

Now our students here have spent literally thousands and thousands of hours rehearsing and practicing and going to camps and doing things that will allow them to let the rest of the world they come in contact with, feel and share those peak aesthetic experiences. They will communicate through the emotions of music, art, dance, theatre, and those feelings. Those in communications have learned how to communicate through language those same feelings and emotions, all focused on giving us a sense of who we are, what our humanity is, and communicating the truth of our real nature.

Gratitude is the greatest of virtues

Let me talk about gratitude, and the value of gratitude. When I was in PBS, I had a very special, good friend who lived in a neighborhood he shared with all of you. One morning on Thanksgiving, I got a telephone call. It was from this special friend, and Fred said, “This morning, I got up early, and while I was thinking about my blessings on Thanksgiving, I thought about you. I thought about how important the work we are doing together to teach children that they are special, that they are wonderful, that they *can* achieve the things they want to achieve.”

I don’t know how you feel when you hear the song, “It’s a Wonderful Day in Our Neighborhood,” but Fred made all of that possible. We went to Los Angeles every six months when I was at PBS to show the television critics our new television programs. At one of those events, Fred came to talk about a special he had done in helping children understand what is going on when they see pictures of war on television, that they are safe, and that there are people who love them, and will protect them. And then, Fred did something quite remarkable. This is a group of journalists who are jaded (as a mild term), they have seen all the crappy television in the world.

They know how base things can be, and here is Fred Rogers telling them about gratitude. Then he said, “I would like you to take the next minute and think about someone you are grateful for, and why you are grateful for them.” He said, “I’ll keep time and let you know when the minute is up, but I want you to do that.” So we took that time, he kept the time, and as I watched the faces of the journalists, suddenly they had tears coming from their eyes, who I would have doubted ever had a tear in their body. It was an astonishing experience, one I would like you to share, now. Think about someone for

whom you are grateful for. Who you wouldn't be who you are and what you are today, without them. I will keep the time, and I will tell you when a minute is up. Let me ask you now to think about someone you are grateful for.

Thank you. A minute seems a long time when it is just silence. I am going to ask you to do what Fred asked those reporters to do. Be sure that you communicate that gratitude to the person you have just thought of. And sometime during the year, like Fred did, find a time to make a list for the people you are grateful for, and tell them how grateful you are to them.

Seeing people as people and not as objects

The next thing I would like to talk about is to act on personal promptings. Dr. Terry Warner at BYU has developed a rival theory of behavior to that developed by Fred. It is based on the premise that every one of us is prompted to treat a person a particular way. When we don't treat the other person like a person, or as we would like to be treated, we treat them as objects, and road blocks to what we want to do, as vehicles to what we want to do, or as irrelevant to what we are interested in doing. When we treat people as objects, we are focused on us. When we treat them as people, we focus on them. Now Terry's theory states that with every encounter we have with another human being, we are prompted on how to respond to them. Terry doesn't say this, but it is my sense that the spirit of Christ prompts us to treat that person a particular way. Let me give you an example.

I just finished dinner with my wife, and it was a wonderful dinner. I feel prompted to get up and help her with the dishes. If I do that, it is no big deal. I mean, it's just doing what I had been prompted to do. But if I don't, if instead of doing what I am prompted to do, I go to the living room to watch the news, *not* doing what I was prompted to do, I then have to go through a routine of what Terry calls, Self-Justification. Now that Self-Justification goes something like this: I am a TV executive of a large television operation and I have a large news operation, so by watching the news on the television, I am just doing my job. I am continuing to work. That justification doesn't quite do it for me. So, I have to go further in justifying sitting and watching TV. My mother did not have any daughters. She only had sons. All of her sons had to do the dishes after every meal. I have done a lifetime's worth of doing dishes, I'm tired of doing dishes, I've done my share, I *really* don't have to do anymore. That justification feels a little better. I'm getting closer. I feel a little easier about sitting there watching the television set. But it is not quite done. Still feeling a little guilty and I don't like it. I go further in my justification: I've worked hard all day. I earned, I *deserved* the right to sit and watch television while my wife does the dishes. Still not enough, I even go a step further. She *likes* to do the dishes!

The interesting thing about this insight on why we act the way we do, is that however much you try, you are never really able to justify ignoring the prompting you receive to behave a particular way towards another person. Listen to your promptings and act on it.

Next area comes from a quote from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland: "It is a pretty thin pancake, that doesn't have two sides." Now in 40 years of being a manager and administrator, I've heard every argument on most problems that you can hear. The interesting thing about it is that the person who feels aggrieved, or wanting my help with the problem, never really tells me the other side of the pancake. They only have their side. The only thing they have is what they see. In making judgments about personal interactions, it is essential to wait until you have heard or seen the other side of the pancake before making any conclusions, or drawing any final judgments. Often people come running in and their hair is on fire, and they have this grand problem or big difficulty. You can listen and then ask, "What is the other side of the pancake?" Well, then they can tell you some of it, sometimes they can tell you all of it.

But they are really only interested on having you knowing and acting on their side of the pancake. Be sure before drawing conclusions that you get the other side of the pancake.

“Be Thou Humble”

President Kimball once said that “people care about the President of the Church. They really don’t care a whole lot about Spencer W. Kimball. It is my job not to confuse the two.” When I was President of PBS, I was offered limousines, I had honors and gifts and invitations to the White House and meetings with congressmen. It would have been very easy to have assumed they were interested in Bruce Christensen. They, of course, weren’t. They were interested in the President of PBS. Whatever our graduates achieve, and do in their life, part of their grounding has to be to understand they are not their titles. They are not the honors they are given. They are not their job. They are not anything but who they are. To be able to keep those separate is an essential part of being an educated and wise and judicious person.

Be an answer to someone’s prayer

You have been taught that service is essential to salvation. King Mosiah teaches us that by serving God’s children, we are really serving God. President Kimball said, “The Lord does hear us and knows our needs, but it is usually through someone’s kind and gentle service that he answers our prayers.” Be an answer to someone’s prayer. Part of fulfilling this admonition comes from acting when prompted. Listen to what you are being prompted on, and be an answer to someone’s prayers. May God bless all of us to use our gifts to make this a better place for all of His children. I ask this blessing in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.