

## *“I the Lord Am with You”*

RONALD A. RASBAND

**M**y dear brothers and sisters, graduates of the BYU summer commencement of 2013, what a magnificent sight you are to see—you who have stayed up late, gotten up early, worked hard, studied much, and made time for missions, marriages, families, and service amid the press of learning at one of the finest institutions in this nation.

Also in this audience are your families and close friends who have stood by you, encouraged you, and prayed for you. We pay tribute to them also, and we are all blessed to be together.

President Cecil Samuelson, Church commissioner of education Elder Paul V. Johnson, and professors and administrators from across this campus, to be invited by the First Presidency to speak here today is truly an honor for my family and for me.

Although I did not attend Brigham Young University, I have become a very enthusiastic fan. I have had the opportunity to sit in these seats in the Marriott Center as a proud parent of five children who have attended the Y and four who have graduated. Three of my BYU graduate daughters are here today. Rachelle,

Jenessa, and Shannon, please stand up and let me honor you. I can tell you from experience, there is nothing like this day.

There is a reason this day is called *commencement*. You now embark on a new life. Your degree is much more than an honor hanging on the wall or a memory to recall with perhaps a sigh of relief. It is a statement that you have persevered and achieved, knowing that your purpose here fits into the Lord’s plan for your life. My hope and prayer today is that through scriptural examples and a few of my own experiences I can share some lessons learned that may be of benefit to you.

I came from a middle-class family. My father drove a delivery truck for a bread company and was a member of the Teamsters’ Union. Dad and Mom were not able to finish college, so for the children in our family, attending college and graduating was a very important goal set in our home.

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*Ronald A. Rasband was a member of the Presidency of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this commencement address was given on 15 August 2013.*

You are fulfilling a goal set early in your life, which is a great accomplishment. Let it be an example to you to continue to set lofty goals. I have always felt that it is better to aim for the stars and drag your feet in the treetops than to aim for the treetops and drag your feet in the mud.

When it came time for me to select a university, my first choice was BYU here in Provo; however, I did not qualify. Not academically, because I had worked through high school more than I had studied, nor financially, because I could not afford to live away from home. Hence the option I chose was to attend the University of Utah, where I could live at home, work locally, and attend school full-time. Sometimes we need to be willing to adjust our goals and modify our plans while never losing sight of the desired end result.

The most important event that happened during my university days was meeting my dear sweetheart, Melanie Twitchell. We dated and then were married in the Salt Lake Temple, sealed there for time and all eternity. That was a goal we both set in our growing-up years.

We chose to start our family shortly after we were married, having confidence that we would be blessed in our temporal matters if we put the Lord first. I can highly recommend this plan to you here today. Also in those beginning years of marriage I served as president of my elders quorum, worked mostly full-time, and continued with my goal to get a degree in business and marketing. Honestly, life could not have been more challenging or full than it was in those college years.

Another life-changing opportunity occurred while I was attending school. I met Jon Huntsman, who would be my future employer and partner. He was my high council advisor while I was serving as elders quorum president.

After a year or so of knowing the Huntsmans, I was surprised one day when

Jon invited me into his business office. I was a beginning senior at the university and just one year away from that long-sought-after degree in business. In that meeting Jon invited me to join his company in marketing and sales. I was overwhelmingly honored, and I felt that the deep and sincere prayer Sister Rasband and I had of finding meaningful employment was being answered.

Jon said to me he was not interested in me because of my academic credentials. (I don't think he ever knew my grade point average. That was a good thing!) He told me he was interested because he felt significant character traits he saw exemplified in my life would work well in his business—character traits such as a strong work ethic and the ability to balance all the life-challenging priorities we were faced with at that time.

I told Jon that I would be thrilled to join his company in the spring after graduation. I explained to him my long-sought-after quest for a college degree and how important it was to my family and me. Jon, in his very kind yet pointed way, explained that he needed me now. The next week he would be in Troy, Ohio, at one of his packaging plants to negotiate with a major customer. He told me if I wanted the job, I needed to be there to become their account manager. That was it—next week in Troy, Ohio, or no job offer at all!

That evening we prayed earnestly and sought the counsel of close loved ones and friends. The most important advice to me was from my sweet wife, Melanie. I remember her saying, "Isn't this what people go to college for, to find an opportunity like this one?" What a partner, what a helpmate! We are a team, and that night was a good example of the full partnership that we have in our marriage. I sincerely recommend that to each of you. Whether you are currently married or awaiting marriage, have it be a full and complete partnership. The Spirit confirmed our decision, and I took the job in Ohio.

That week I walked off the campus of the University of Utah just two semesters short of receiving my degree. Eleven years later I was humbled when Jon Huntsman appointed me as the president of his global corporation with thousands of employees and billions in revenues. This should suggest that there is a masterpiece within each one of us, and when spiritually nurtured, carefully mentored, and loyally engaged in building up our families and the Lord's kingdom, all things are possible.

Perhaps now you can understand why today is such a special, memorable day for me. Since those early feelings of wishing I could attend BYU to this very day—now standing here at commencement—it is a dream come true!

Commencement also reminds me of the account in Matthew 14 when Christ had spent the afternoon teaching a great multitude and feeding them with five loaves and two fishes. Many of you will appreciate how those fishes and loaves multiplied, as have your meager supplies through your years of college. Following the afternoon of this great miracle, the disciples boarded a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee while Jesus “went up into a mountain apart to pray” (verse 23). We read in Matthew: “The ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary” (verse 24).

Consider this boat as your launch into a new life—be it a profession, further study, or raising a family. You will still be juggling tasks and responsibilities. You learned how here; you will need those skills for the rest of your life. The way ahead will not be smooth or without incident. In the coming stages of your life you will feel the boat rocking under you, no matter your preparation or your sheer goodness. Recognize the turbulence for what it is. The Lord allows us challenges that at times will feel like tsunamis to make us strong and effective in His service and to help us always turn to Him.

Continuing in Matthew:

*And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*

*And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.*

*But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*

*And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.*

*And [Jesus] said, Come. [Matthew 14:25–29]*

I love that image. Peter, the devoted disciple, needed only that call to “come” and he was over the side of the boat and walking toward Jesus. He did not hesitate or stop to gauge the risks.

That’s where you are. You are ready to respond to the Lord’s call: “Come.” Commencement is just that. You are being called to go out into the world as representatives of Jesus Christ with all you have been taught and know to be true.

Matthew continues: “And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus” (verse 29). Think of it: “He walked on the water.” This was unfamiliar territory to this fisherman. You too are poised for walking that unfamiliar ground. You have prepared your minds and have learned to take responsibility; you have been schooled in more than mortal knowledge. The Spirit abounds on this campus because you, disciples of Jesus Christ, have been worthy of that blessing; you will take that Spirit with you into the world.

“But when [Peter] saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me” (verse 30). What a message! Peter, by the power of God—there is no other way he could do it—walked on water. On that short journey he looked down and saw the waves churning and felt the wind swirling, and he faltered. He began to sink. He immediately turned to the source of all power, to his beloved Master, to call for His help.

“And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him” (verse 31). That hand, brothers and sisters, is always there for you; it has been there for me. Jesus Christ will be your greatest ally and mentor in your years ahead. He will be, as we read in the scriptures, “on your right hand and on your left” (D&C 84:88) if you live close to Him, His words, and His ways.

Jobs, assignments, contentions, and moves from here to there will lap at your feet to distract you and consume you. It is the way of mortality. Be wise. Know that you can draw upon the power of God to always have His Spirit with you on this journey. “Come,” He will say to you with an outstretched hand. That doesn’t mean He will change the circumstances; you may still be out on the swirling water, but His Atonement will lift you to higher ground.

What He asks is that your daily life reflect your testimony “that He lives” (D&C 76:22). Take counsel from the Lord’s words at the beginning of this dispensation:

*Wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come.* [D&C 68:6]

You can do that—and you must do that. It is for this very purpose that you leave here today prepared with an education and armed in the truths of the gospel. Few other graduates in mortarboards with diplomas in hand have such a charge. You have a unique assignment in the Lord’s kingdom to go “about doing good” (Acts 10:38) no matter what else you are doing.

You will encounter many opportunities to “lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better” (D&C 25:10). Know this: your life on earth will not be measured by what you do for a profession or what your address is or what callings you hold. What will

be recorded in the Lamb’s book of life is how you live your covenants—how you prepare yourself to meet God.

Don’t wait to make enough money so you can afford to serve the Lord. Don’t put your work in front of your parenting. Don’t make it a habit to reach out to steady the ark in the Lord’s kingdom. Don’t feel entitled to more than your share of the Lord’s blessings, and don’t boast about them as if they were a measure of your own greatness. Be humble, kind, and forgiving. Be generous. Be gentle and long-suffering—and, most of all, be honest. We need you out there holding fast and helping others to do the same.

Being an example of what is right requires fortitude, hard work, earnest desire, and energy. It means living the laws of God. You will have remarkable influence over those with whom you work, serve, and live—your families, neighbors, ward members, work associates, and even the store clerk.

It may have been acceptable for the disciples to sit in the boat and wait until Jesus Christ walked to the side. However, Peter knew when he heard “come” that his integrity to the cause of Christ required he do just that.

The Lord will call you to places and positions you would have never expected. I view my job opportunity with Jon Huntsman to have been just that. President Thomas S. Monson has said, “When God speaks and a man obeys, man will always be right” (“The Call of Duty,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 37).

Study the scriptures to know the word of God, be prayerful, be found standing in holy places—the temple in particular—and “be strong and of good courage” (1 Chronicles 28:20) even when the waves come and the dam breaks.

The next stages of your life can be richly rewarding. You can at the end of the day give an accounting to the Lord that has little to do with what happened and much to do with how you were sustained by the power of

God. I have felt that influence in my home, in my assignments, and in the lives of my wife, children, and grandchildren. It is a sweet peace to know the Lord is with you and that you are His and that when His hand reaches out to you

the grip is familiar and the message is clear: "Come unto me" (Matthew 11:28).

May the Lord bless each one of you, we—your fellow colleagues, brethren, and sisters—pray. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.