

The Ships of Life

PAUL H. DUNN

What a sight! I am grateful, my brothers and sisters, to have this opportunity once more to return to this great campus, to feel—as I always do—the spirit of this student body and of this great faculty. I compliment you on choosing Brigham Young University and pray for your continued success as you catch the vision of the purpose of this great institution.

I said to one student as I came in, “At least you can’t be more than a week behind.”

I am impressed with the size of this audience and with the facility and would like to compliment you on the general mechanics of moving into this great center. This is one of the few times in the history of my Church experience I have been able to park without being flagged or ticketed.

I thought of an experience that one of our senior brethren had at the Church parking lot. We have the same kinds of problems there that you do here. This good brother who has been around for quite a few years drove into the parking lot one morning. There was a fellow attending the gate who did not recognize the General Authority when he drove past. Using a very authoritative voice, he shouted, “Hey! Are you supposed to be in here?” The senior brother rolled down the window and said,

“You know, I’ve been wondering that for thirty years myself.” I thought about that as I came this morning.

One other experience comes to mind. There are certain challenges as well as some humor that go with sometimes not being recognized. The other day I went over to a department at the Church headquarters where I had been many times, and a fellow at the desk thought he recognized me. He said, “Good morning, Elder Packer.”

I said, “Well, thank you very much for the compliment, but I’m not Elder Packer.”

“Oh,” he said, “I’m sorry, Elder Hanks. I didn’t recognize you.”

I can’t resist one other. Once in a great while a General Authority gets a Sunday without a stake conference assignment. I had one several years ago. I decided to attend my own ward. That’s a rare and interesting experience. In the time since I had last attended, our ward had been divided. We had a new member in the bishopric that I didn’t know, and it became

Paul H. Dunn was a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 9 September 1972.

obvious, as I approached the door, that he didn't know me. As I walked in, he said, "Good morning! I'm Brother _____, and who are you?"

I said, "I'm Paul Dunn."

He said, "Oh! You're Jeanne Dunn's husband."

And I said, "Yes I am."

He said, "We're honored to have you at church this morning."

I said, "I'm honored to be here."

He said, "If you'll follow me, I'll take you to your class."

And he did. He took me into the Senior Aaronic class. The teacher there was equally gracious and wonderful, and he didn't know me either. He welcomed me with open arms. And, you know, it got to be kind of funny; because as he started to teach, the irony of it all was that the lesson he taught that morning I wrote. About four times during the session, I raised my hand and made a contribution. After the class the teacher said, "You know, for a guy that doesn't come to church very often, you sure are smart."

Well, I went up after class and said, "Sir, I just want to tell you something."

He said, "Please do."

I said, "I thought that was the finest lesson I've ever heard."

He called me up the following Tuesday and said, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I was having too much fun," I responded, "and besides, you're a great fellowshipper. You were tremendous."

Challenges

I told the seniors here this summer that recently I was given an honor at my old high school. Coming back to BYU has reminded me of that experience. I was honored as the alumnus of the year from Hollywood High; and if you checked my transcripts you'd see why that's quite a miracle. The honor was not for academic or athletic achievement but for

activities in religion. They were paying honor to me as a Latter-day Saint. What a compliment to be recognized as a Latter-day Saint.

It was a thrill to go back to the old campus and reminisce, as people my age do. I walked around the halls and out on the ball field. I couldn't help but visit one or two of the classrooms where I'd been a student. I actually found my desk in my first-period English class during my senior year. I found it—I'm embarrassed to tell you how. I had carved my name in the desk. Now, you don't do that sort of thing these days, but some of us did. In fact, I didn't realize how original I was because my name was on a tombstone very neatly carved. It said: "Here lies Paul Dunn, who died waiting for the bell to ring."

As things will happen, the teacher whose class this was attended the banquet where I was to receive the award. I couldn't resist telling a story about one of my experiences in her class. She was a very exacting and precise lady who dressed every bit the part of the old schoolmarm. She stood straight as a toothpick, had no shape, wore long, black dresses and a big bob in her hair at the back, and she used to carry a ruler around and was very adept at using it. Quite a motivator.

I was having a problem of being tardy to this class. One morning she kept me after class and said, "Young man, if you're tardy one more time, I'll see to it you're dropped from the varsity ball team." Now, that was one method to get through to me; so I took a vow with her that I'd be tardy no more, and for many days I did very well. Later one morning when I had only about five days to go until the end of the semester, I was running about two minutes behind. I was pedaling my bike as fast as I could down Hollywood Boulevard. I go on campus, parked and locked it, and ran across the quad and into the liberal arts building where my class was located. Just as I entered the building, the bell started to ring. The tardy bell lasted twelve seconds; that's the time I had

to go the length of the hall. Standing at the end of the hall in the doorway of my room was my teacher. She had her hand on the doorknob, and I knew that the second the bell quit ringing she'd close it. I started to run. The building had highly polished tile floors. I had on a pair of leather shoes, and I wasn't getting much traction. I could see she was eager to close the door. I ran and finally got some traction. I could sense just before I got to the door that the bell was going to quit, so I drew up on all the prowess I had. I went into a hook slide. I actually slid the last twenty feet, thanks to the highly polished floors. I slid right by her under two desks; and I remember that as I passed her I looked up and hollered, "*Safe!*"

Speaking of schools, I have just come from Southern California, where I've had one of the most glorious spiritual experiences of my life. President Oaks mentioned that I did some undergraduate work a few years ago at Chapman College. During my stay there, I came under the influence of a great teacher. Thank God for great teachers—some who don't even belong to the Church, but particularly for those who do, who have an abiding faith and testimony.

Dr. Guy M. Davis, a recognized authority of the New Testament at Chapman and throughout the western United States, was my teacher. This was twenty-three years ago. We used to have a little fun in his class. He would kid with us. I'd challenge him.

I said on one occasion in private, "I believe that whether you're aware of it or not, you're a Mormon. You act and think like one. The day will come when you and I will testify to these truths, and I'll have the opportunity of witnessing your baptism." I have corresponded, visited, and worked with this man now twenty-three years; and we baptized him last Friday night. I haven't words or the ability to express my affection for this man or the great thrill that came on the occasion of his baptism.

One humorous incident comes to mind. Dr. Davis is an authority on the book of John. He wrote his dissertation at the University of Southern California School of Religion on the apostle. He's since made many contributions concerning this disciple and apostle of the Lord. I raised my hand in one class, because I'm rather bold and brash on such occasions, and I said, "Dr. Davis, you keep quoting John. That's wonderful, but you're using secondary sources who don't really know this apostle. Didn't you know that, according to his own words, he still lives and tarries upon the earth as a special witness of our Lord and Savior?"

"Good heavens," he said, "you mean the Mormons have got John too?"

I said, "They do. And while we don't know his exact whereabouts, he lives and is a special witness."

And he was really overwhelmed. Every time he'd see me after that he'd say, "What's John doing?"

Well, about this time we were preparing to dedicate the Los Angeles Temple. And I thought, "Well, my grade needs a little help, so I'll take the class out and all of the religion faculty and give them a special tour." So I made arrangements with the authorities at the temple, and we took the tour. They were thrilled with that great edifice, excited about the opportunities, and couldn't believe the beauty. They were very inquisitive as we walked through the building. They'd say, "What's that? What does this mean?" I had a wonderful chance to teach.

Finally, we got up into the area of the celestial room. These rooms are very beautiful in their appointment. The room was roped off so you couldn't enter, but we could see a couple of rooms where we do ordinance work and a staircase that went up to another floor. My friend pulled me aside and said, "Maybe I'm out of order, but where does that staircase go?"

"Oh," I said, "you shouldn't have asked."

"Oh, my gosh," he said, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be out of order."

I said, "You weren't; and for you, I'll tell."

"Oh," he said, "would you?"

I said, "I will, if you promise you won't tell anybody else."

"Oh," he said, "I promise."

So I took him over by an isolated pillar, and I said, "Promise, now?"

He said, "I promise."

I said, "You see that staircase?"

"Uh-huh!"

I said, "There's a room at the top."

"Oh!"

And then I said, "That's where John lives!"

"Good heavens," he said.

We have John, and we now have Dr. Davis.

Reminiscing

It was mentioned that I had an opportunity to preside as a mission president in New England. I think New England is very special, inasmuch as it's the birthplace of our country and the birthplace of many of the great early leaders of this Church. Some forty plus early contributors to the faith found their homes in New England. Three that are very prominent, of course, are the Prophet Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Oliver Cowdery. I was honored to be the caretaker—spiritually speaking—for a while, of that great area.

Occasionally even mission presidents need motivation; and in New England I used to go up to the birthplace of the Prophet on occasion to renew spiritual feelings and commitments. I used to get a lift historically as well. Occasionally I'd drive eleven miles from the mission headquarters out to old Concord, where the North Bridge is located. This is the location of the commencement of the Revolutionary War.

And as I would walk up and down the banks of the Concord River, reminiscing about our early heritage, I'd gain great strength. Eleven miles in the other direction is old

Boston Harbor. Anchored to the moorings there is one of the great vessels of all time, *Old Ironsides*. I hope when you review your history, here or elsewhere, you don't just do it mechanically, but sense something of the divine and the historical in the lives of those who paid so much for what we have today. This great old ship, commonly known as the U.S.S. *Constitution*, did more, I suppose, than any other single vessel in preserving the freedom of this country. Over seventy times it went to sea with our enemies and won every battle. It's still commissioned as one of the great ships of the United States Navy. You can't stand beside that old vessel or walk upon its decks without being somewhat uplifted and touched.

Workmanship

As I told some of the seniors here in summer school, it reminded me of a few ships that Brother Adam Bennion used to talk about. I'd like to borrow from his theme and impress upon your minds the importance of anchoring some of these next to *Old Ironsides*. I would hope in your harbor you would put next to the U.S.S. *Constitution* that great vessel *workmanship*. I sit with my brethren on the Board of Trustees of this great institution, and your president and other officers and administrators of this school take great pride in the fact that you have come here to learn. We have placed at your disposal some of the greatest authorities in every field possible, and, more particularly, teachers who are committed to a divine cause.

If I have one concern as I travel the United States or, in fact, the world, it's in seeing sloppy workmen. I've just completed building a new home here in Mormon country. It's been quite a revelation. It's a frustrating, exciting experience. One of the things that I noted, because I'm supposed to be somewhat oriented in an educational line, is that there are very few workmen today who take pride in their work. I didn't take a poll as to how many of these people came and exercised or supplied their

services on my behalf; but I suspect, just by my conversation, many belong to this faith. I was appalled at how many really didn't care about the quality of their work but were in it for the dollar or "how quick I can get out of here today," and service seemed to be a forgotten product. I would hope and pray, my fellow students, that you would learn to take pride in your work.

Sometimes homework becomes mechanical, and the seminar or the class seems almost too routine. I appreciate with you that most students have to sift and seek for those eternal golden kernels that build a philosophy of life. That's a part of the educational process, learning to sift.

I would hope that in these years of study and preparation you acquire here you would learn to be great workmen, a true craftsman. My, the world needs quality in service and performance. It seems to be a lost art. I hope you have come to learn the tools of your trade. It was James Truslow Adams who said, "There are obviously two kinds of education: one teaches you how to make a living (that's the academic side to a great extent), the other how to live." And that's why this is a great religious institution. I pray you'll take pride in your work. Don't worry about the clock; you work because the world needs your faith and your great talents.

Friendship

Second, in your fleet, I hope you would include that great vessel *friendship*. I notice, as I travel the world and, yes, even in the Church, there are a lot of lonely people. I just sense today, in this wonderful congregation, there are some lonely Latter-day Saints. I think we have enough scriptures in our standard works that indicate we ought to be concerned about our fellowmen. The Savior put it very well when he said, "Lose yourself in the service of others."

We have a tendency, because of our own insecurities, to become turned in, selfish,

self-oriented. We're here in part to learn how to turn ourselves out, to lose ourselves and help somebody else, to relieve the frustrations of others. Mormons, if not careful, can become very cliquish. I would like to challenge this great student body to look out and befriend those who need a friend.

When we went back to Boston we took with us an eight-year-old daughter. Our other two were attending Brigham Young University, and we left them here. We went from a family of five to a family of three in one evening, never again to be brought together as a family because both of my older daughters married while we were on our missions. That's a great experience, but here now my little eight-year-old became an only child overnight—quite a frustration. And then, to top it off, we moved to a new area; and she was lonesome for her friends and her acquaintances at school.

We signed her up in the Russell School in Cambridge. The Russell School was built in 1888; and it is not a very imposing looking school, except to an archaeologist. It had lots of weeds in the yard, and a terribly musty smell greeted one as he entered the building. The floorboards buckled, and you got an eerie feeling as you walked the halls.

We tried to prepare this little girl for her first day at school just as soon as we arrived. Because it was a long way off, she didn't panic; but as the day drew closer her concern increased. We took her shopping for new school clothes, had a family evening organized around how to adjust and what to do and how to turn yourself out to adjust to the new environment. She could handle that all right, because it was still theory. And then the night before, we planned a special program around helping her for the special day. She retired to her bed all right but seemed quite restless.

The next few hours passed, and then she suddenly appeared at the door where I was studying. She was rubbing her stomach. She said, "Dad, I'm sick." Now, you know what

kind of sickness she had, don't you? Not physical, not mental, but emotional. "Can't sleep, sir."

Well, I invited her over, put her on my lap, and we chatted for a moment. Then I put on some music that we liked to listen to together and rubbed her tummy. She finally drifted into never-never land and seemed pretty well under control. I took her body, with its dangling legs, upstairs and put her back to bed. I turned to go out, got as far as the door, and she said, "I'm still awake." I went back and lay down on the bed and stroked her head for a few moments, and she finally went to sleep.

The next morning while I was at breakfast she came down dressed only in her slip. She said, "Dad, I just thought you ought to know I don't think I'll go to school today."

I said, "Why not?"

She said, "I think I'm going to throw up."

Now, you know what she's trying to tell me, don't you? "I'm nervous. Will my teachers like me? Will I be accepted?" Oh, she was not capable of asking those kinds of questions, but these were the concerns of her heart. She was lonely; she didn't know how to fit in. She was concerned about making new friends.

And I said, "Well, you know the answer to that, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I guess we're going."

I said, "How would you like your mother and me to drive you over?" She liked that, so we did.

We got in front of the school, and the tears started to well up. The warning bell sounded; I got her out of the car, and she grabbed hold of my leg like a tackle I hope we've got this year for BYU. I had to drag her, literally, to the door. The door opened, and now she clung to both legs. I shall never forget the expression on the face of that eight-year-old. She looked at me, and she said, "Dad, if you really love, if you really do, you won't send me in there."

I said, "Honey, this may sound like a strange philosophy: it's because I do love you that I am sending you in there."

We went in. The tears really came now, without shame. Then it happened. Then the little miracle. Around the corner came the only other Latter-day Saint in the whole student body. Thank God, another eight-year-old girl. And she had seen her a couple of times at some stake functions. And this little girl was an extrovert's extrovert. Even though only eight, she had learned to lose herself in the interest of others. She came around the corner, and she said, "Oh, Kellie! How are you? Gosh, it's good to see you! What's your home room number?" And Kellie told her. "Great! That's mine, too. Come on, I'll show you where."

And before Kellie knew it, she had let go, got about ten paces out in front of me; and then I'll never forget this lesson. She turned and said, "Oh, Dad, you can go now. I don't need you anymore."

Well, we need friends. And the Latter-day Saint people with their philosophy ought to be the friendliest in the world. We are, but we tend to sometimes get in little corners, and I'd like to challenge this great student body to extend this tremendous influence to the rest of the world.

Courtship

Hopefully, next to friendship you'll anchor the vessel *courtship*. This is a great area, and I haven't time to develop it this morning. But if I have one concern as your friend and so-called leader, it is that sometimes we think that just member marrying member guarantees eternal happiness and solves all problems. You don't have to look very far in our society to see that there's more to mate selection than just membership. I hope you are considering the intellectual, the spiritual, the emotional as well as the physical. And I wouldn't want to minimize the physical; it's important to look right, project

yourself well. But those aren't the only things that build for eternal joy and happiness.

I pray that you young ladies in this great institution will go all the way in your education. Sometimes there's a problem when you drop out of school and become just a housewife. You want to take with you a spiritual and intellectual capability that will lift your husband and complement him in terms of what the gospel teaches. I appreciate that all education doesn't have to be formal. Of course it doesn't. The Prophet Joseph Smith and many others are excellent examples of self-educated persons. But the glory of God is intelligence, and intelligence he expects us to use in mate selection. As the years progress, you will learn that spirituality plays a much greater role in family togetherness and solidarity than you now realize. It's the spirit that gives depth and dimension.

Hardship

I hope next to that great ship *courtship* you have anchored the vessel *hardship*. Now, you wouldn't be worth much in this old world if you didn't have a hardship or two. Sometimes young people would just like to go through life without a challenge. It seems easier, but it isn't. The purpose of mortality is to learn to be like our Heavenly Father, and hardship is the refining tool that prepares us for that great and glorious day. We all have barriers, obstacles. There's not a person in this congregation who couldn't bring us all to tears with his ups and downs. I've noticed that no one is exempt. I think the purpose of life is to see how you handle it, not whether you get one or not.

I had 467 full-time missionaries given to me over a period of three years. What a glorious experience. I remember I hadn't been in New England more than an hour when the telephone rang. On the line was an elder I hadn't met yet, an elder who had been in the mission field just one week. He had some concerns, as sometimes missionaries do, and he wanted

to go home. He didn't just say, "I want to go home." He announced he was going. He was a small young man in stature, quite good-looking, and a sharp athlete; but he was born with a handicap, and this was one of his barriers. He had only half a larynx. When he spoke he spoke with a harsh voice, and people often made fun of him. He announced on the phone, "President Dunn, I just called to tell you I'm going home tonight, so don't try to stop me."

I said, "Well, at least pay me the courtesy of coming over and getting acquainted and saying good-bye."

"All right, I'll come by on my way to the airport."

He came over. In the meantime, I checked his file and found among other things one thing in my favor—he wanted to be an athlete. He was a good one. He wanted to make a career out of sports. I sat him down. He said, "Now, President, you're not going to talk me into staying."

I said, "Didn't intend to. Tell me your problem."

He said, "It's very simple. I don't have a testimony. I don't believe in the Lord. Furthermore, and you'll learn sometime, my home life hasn't been what it ought to be. I hate my dad, I hate my mother, I hate this Church, I hate this mission, and I already hate you."

I thought, "Well, this is a thrilling challenge; first day on your mission and you've got a young man thinking like this." I said, "I don't know what all the circumstances are, but let me tell you something. The Lord lives, and he loves you. Your parents, for reasons you can't fully comprehend, love you. This Church loves you, this mission loves you, and I like you a little bit. Now," I said, "you can walk out of this mission anytime you want; but I don't think you're going to and let me tell you why. You're not a quitter. You may have a lot of hang-ups and problems, but you're not a quitter. I noticed from your athletic record that you don't quit. Let me tell you something you may

not know. I played professional baseball for a number of years and found myself behind in early and middle innings of many a ball game. If you were my coach, and we were behind five to two in the seventh inning, and I came to you and said, 'Coach, let's get out of here while we can and save face,' what would you say?"

He said, "We've got two more innings to catch up and win."

I said, "Exactly, and a mission is no different!"

"Well," he said, "that's baseball."

I said, "No, it isn't. The game of life plays by the same rules and principles. I just don't think you're going to quit because you're not that kind of player. There's the door. You can go if you must, but I don't think you will."

"Well," he said, "I'll try it one more week."

"Fine. One more week. You call me next week, and we'll talk about it."

He called me the next week, and he gave me the same dialogue. He didn't even miss a line. He had it out again, and would you believe for the next 103 weeks. Every week, through the mail, in person, on the phone, "I'm going, President!"

"So long, Elder; but I don't think you are."

And then it happened, the 104th week. Another phone call and he said, "I've got to tell you. It happened. I got the spirit!" And he told me of some very special experiences he had had that week, how the Lord had answered his prayers and how he received a testimony. Through real hardship and prayers he got an answer.

The following Sunday he came into the mission home for his last evening prior to his departure home. We used to have a simple ceremony when a group departed; and when it came time for him to speak he said, "Can I say something, President?"

I said, "You haven't hesitated up to now. What do you want to tell us?"

He said, "You know what I found out this week? I've found what a testimony is. I believe

in the Lord. He lives, and I love him. I love my mom and dad. I love this Church. I love this mission, and I kind of like you."

Well, that's great. Hardship. Don't apologize for it. Hit it head on. Just remember—I think I've taught this to you before—it was Bob Newhart who said, "Crises plus time equals humor." The greatest crises you face right now or will ever face, given a little time, will seem humorous under other circumstances.

Remember the dates you didn't get in high school? Kind of a crisis, wasn't it? Sort of funny now. I asked a little girl at Hollywood High—it took me seven weeks to get the courage to ask her—to go to the show with me: "Will you go to the show with me?"

She said, "No."

Just about crushed me. That was a great crisis. I went home and felt terrible and thought, "I'm nothing." Now it's kind of funny. Crises plus time equals humor. Keep a sense of humor in your life. Be balanced.

Worship

Finally, I would say anchor next to the other great vessels *worship*. This is perhaps the greatest ship of all. Go home and read the 133rd section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the 39th verse. The Lord tells us why it's important. Worship. I haven't time to develop that to any extent. Let me just say this. God really lives. He's your Father. Christ, his son, our brother, stands at the head of this Church. I suppose most of what I have said won't be remembered by the time you get back to class, but the feeling that comes when one of us bears his testimony is perhaps the lingering effect, and that's why we take an hour out of a busy week to meet together.

Just last week the General Authorities met with the First Presidency in the upper room of the Temple. This was the first official meeting we have had with the new First Presidency of the Church. I've been a General Authority for eight and a half years. I have been in many

meetings with President Harold B. Lee. Great and marvelous and magnificent as his faith and testimony are and were when he served as an apostle of the Lord, as I watched him very carefully and closely in this special room I saw for my own self the mantle of the Prophet. I testify to you young people that it is real. This

was not the same Harold B. Lee. He has been called and ordained to be God's prophet today. God lives; Jesus is the Christ, and he works through his servants. To that I testify as I bear solemn witness to these things. I give you my blessing in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.