



Reflections from February 5, 2009

A Thankful and Hopeful University Community

On February 5, 2009, about 1700 people gathered at the Carl Perkins Civic Center in Jackson for an evening of remembrance and thanksgiving. It was my privilege to offer words of welcome and thanksgiving to the many men and women who have helped this university recover from the dark night of February 5, 2008. Our thanksgiving was first and foremost offered to God through prayers and praise, led by Provost Carla Sanderson and Professor Chris Mathews, along with a 250 voice choir and 30 piece orchestra. We also had the opportunity once more to offer our public expressions of gratitude to first responders and rescue workers, civic and community leaders, members of the media, healthcare providers, churches, parents, alumni, faculty, staff, students, trustees, contractors and subcontractors, architects, and the thousands of volunteers and donors. Indeed, at Union University we are a most grateful people and from the bottom of our hearts, we want everyone who helped us to know of our deep, deep gratitude.

Later that evening I was asked to offer reflections on the trials that we have experienced over the past year. These reflections were based on Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. From the experiences of the past year we have learned afresh that God is indeed the God of all strength and comfort. The trials of the past year have served to strengthen the Union community in many ways. The season of suffering has helped us identify in a new way with the sufferings of Christ, and have enabled Union students, faculty and staff to empathize with the struggles of others. Our tears have been

used of God in a redemptive way.

The experiences of the past year have also brought about perseverance, and have prepared students for other challenges that they will face in days ahead. We have at times found ourselves in a desperate situation, and in these times we were energized and enabled by hope. I think we all would say that we never want to go through anything like this long and challenging year again. Like the apostle himself, we can say we have been "hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8). And by God's grace, we likewise can say, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (4:16).

Since February 6th of last year we have prayed for that kind of renewal across our campus, for God to bring renewal out of the rubble. We offer thanksgiving to God that he has answered our prayers in abundance. The words of the apostle have become more meaningful for the entire Union University community this past year. We are now able to look back over the past year with wonder and thanksgiving at the recovery and rebuilding process, but not just in the recovery and rebuilding process, for God has been at work bringing spiritual renewal in the lives of students, staff, faculty, administrators, and trustees alike.

As we look back over the past year, we still have many unanswered questions and we still shed tears in our times of reflection. Without hope and trust in God, the challenges of the past year would have seemed insurmountable. As a university



community we are now prepared to take the next steps with a full recognition that God's good providence transcends the experiences of men and women. While February 5, 2008 was perhaps the worst night in Union's long history, there have been many, many good days over the past 12 months. We have learned that God can take actions that have seemed bad to us and use them for good.

Despite the difficulties of the past year, we now turn our attention to new challenges and new opportunities. As we refocus on the distinctive mission of Union University, we do so with the assurance that our great God can and does use such events as those of this past year for his eternal good, even events that are quite difficult for us to fully understand. Therefore we face the future as a most grateful and hopeful people. We are thankful to God for the renewal, recovery, and rebuilding that has taken place, and we are now refocused on the future of Union University for days, months, and years to come.

Soli Deo Gloria,

David S. Dockery
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