Good Morning!

We called a professional NCC bell-ringer out of retirement to do the honors this morning.

Mr. Timothy McIntosh is a 1962 NCC graduate in mathematics who says his job as bell-ringer helped support him through four years of college! He was paid about $60 a month to ring the bell five times a day: to wake the campus, announce breakfast, first class, lunch, and dinner. And from what I understand, at 6 o’clock in the morning, he was none too popular with the folks in the residence halls closest to this bell.

But we’re grateful he agreed to drive down from Maryland to do the honors today. Thank you Timothy.

I would like to thank all of you for coming to the inaugural event in what will be a year of convocations celebrating the centennial of North Carolina Central University.

We begin our observance with the ringing of this bell because historically, the bell holds special significance in this country, particularly for the African-American community.

The most famous, our nation’s Liberty Bell, became a symbol of hope and freedom even before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. After all, it bears the inscription from the Book of Leviticus (25:10), “Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all of the inhabitants thereof.”

The image of the Liberty Bell and its inscription were adopted and printed on the campaign materials for William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist movement. So beginning in the 1830s, the bell was associated with freedom from slavery.

At the last stop on the Underground Railroad, in a small community called Buxton, Ontario, a bell would sound whenever there was a new, dark-skinned arrival from the Southern states.

That bell had been a gift from “the colored inhabitants of Pittsburgh” to the Buxton conspirator, the Reverend William King. And it still chimes today in Buxton’s St. Andrews Church steeple.

Beginning in 1910 here in Durham, almost 100 years ago, this bell sounded a note of hope for a better future in the stifled atmosphere of oppression of Jim Crow segregation. This bell signaled opportunity, but also certainty, as it tolled like clockwork, letting the students know they were drawing nearer to a better life every hour of every day.

And if you listen well, you will hear that NCCU’s bell still holds the promise of a better life through education.

In honor of the founder, Dr. James E. Shepard, I will ring this bell.

In honor of the faculty, staff, and alumni of this university, I call upon Dr. Arthrell Sanders, alumna and retired professor, to sound this bell.

Finally, in honor of the students of today and of the future, I ask Dwayne Johnson, student government association president for the Centennial Year, to ring this bell.

I will close with these words from Alfred Lord Tennyson’s In Memoriam
‘Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.’