

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

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Starving Sheep

A few years ago I was present at a house with a couple of veterinarians and law enforcement officials. We had assembled to investigate a complaint of animal cruelty or neglect. When the front door of the house was opened, an odor flowed from the space that was one of the most foul I have ever had the misfortune of allowing into my nose. The vets came out of the house and their eyes were watering so badly they could hardly see. One vet said, "If I could keep my eyes from watering, I might be able to see inside that house." There were at least four dead puppies in the house; several more that were half starved and dehydrated. More were found in cages outside.

Unfortunately, the conditions I have described are not rare. Too many times, livestock, pets and other animals are left without care. The person "responsible" simply leaves and doesn't provide the care that is needed. How could a person do such a thing? Don't they care? Doesn't it bother them to leave such suffering behind them?

However, if we think of ourselves as the critters and Jesus as the Shepherd, WE may be responsible for the suffering of our Lord. In Mosiah 5:84-85 is found the words: "Oh, how marvelous are the works of the Lord, and how long does he suffer with his people; and how blind and impenetrable are the understandings of the children of men; for they will not see wisdom, neither do they desire that he should rule over them. They are a wild flock, which flees

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TESTIMONIES AND SERMON NOTES

Remembering Jesus Christ Calls For Doing

For his sermon December 1, Peter Cornish chose Matthew 16:24-28, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments. Break not my commandments for to save your lives; for whosoever will save his life in this world, shall lose it in the world to come. And whosoever shall lose his life in this world for my sake, shall find it in the world to come. Therefore, forsake the world and save your souls; ...'

Peter spoke of the setting of today's service being the Communion in the Thanksgiving season just before Christmas and declared, "The only thing I could think to talk about was Christ and our response to him in the knowledge of His sacrifice for us. I have been thinking about Him, about His life and the many things He has done for us. In a few minutes we will hear the prayer of blessing on the bread. It says, we do this in remembrance of Him. Hopefully, all of us have come in remembrance of Him and the sacrifice He has made for us. Now, to do this in remembrance of Him, we need to remember something about Him, which also implies that we know something about Him. So let's recall a few instances in Christ's life that show different aspects of the reasons why He came.

"First and foremost, in my mind, the greatest act that He did was to give Himself willingly for the people, to be sacrificed and killed on the cross. I don't think it is possible to think about Jesus Christ without thinking about this part of His life. One of the main purposes He had was to come and die for us. In the theme of Thanksgiving, we should be very thankful for this. Were it not for His sacrifice, we would not be able to receive salvation - to be reconciled to God, to receive the blessing of eternal life, to live with God forever. None of these things would be possible without that sacrifice.

"Again, when I remember Christ, I remember one particular occasion where some people had brought this woman to him and said they had caught her in adultery - caught her in the very act. 'The law says, kill her. What do you say?' We remember that Christ told

the people, 'Let he that is without sin cast the first stone.' We know the story. Every person that had come in accusation of this woman left. Christ looked up at the woman and asked, 'Where are thine accusers?' She said, 'They have all gone, Lord.' He answered, 'Neither do I condemn thee. Go, thou, and sin no more.'

"In this story, there are many things, but I would like to think of just a few, particularly the forgiveness of God - the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. No matter what any of us in this room may have done in our lives, no matter how sinful, no matter how bad, there is nothing that we can do in ourselves to make it right. Whether it is a small sin in our minds or a large sin, there is nothing that we can do to wipe it out. Only through the grace and sacrifice of Jesus Christ do we have that privilege. No matter what we have done, He promises us that if we ask for forgiveness, He will grant us that forgiveness. But there is also an important part of the story at the end. Jesus says, 'Go, thou, and sin no more'. Sometimes we forget that last part. He offers forgiveness, but He also expects us to turn away from our sins.

"Another story I think about this morning is the story of Lazarus. Here was a man who was very close to Jesus Christ. Remember, he died and was dead for awhile. Christ came and raised him from the dead. I remember the story because of the power Jesus Christ has - power over the universe, for remember, all things were created through Him. He has all power over them. So, I remember the salvation, the forgiveness and the power that comes through Jesus Christ.

"This is an amazing time in history. In my field, and many of those who are here who are in a similar field of science, we see it every day. It's amazing to look at the history of science and to see all of the things that have happened through the years, all the advances, and see the amazing things that have been able to be accomplished. I remember once watching a documentary on Intel. (Intel is a computer company that produces processors that are in most computers these days.) They say now that they need an electron microscope just to see all of the transistors and stuff they put into the micro-chips because they are so small. These transistors are smaller than the wave length of light, and they think in the future they are going to be able to get smaller; so they can have zillions upon zillions of these little transistors and parts on a single micro-chip.

"In biochemistry, my field, it's gotten to the point where we can look at single molecules, a single protein. We can look at one single reaction that is too small for us to see by any microscope. But we can look and study these different processes. Ten years ago, that was impossible. Fifty years ago, it was not even conceivable. The advance is just amazing! Along with the great advances in Science, there are many things that are bad in this world. I won't talk about those, but we do need to remember them.

"This is also an amazing time in history from the religious aspect. As we note from the scriptures, Christ came in the meridian of time. When He was here, He did many things. He established the new covenant, He provided salvation and He told us that He would come again. Christ has promised us that He is going to come back for the last time, and our belief is that He will come again in our lifetime. Sometimes it seems that when I speak of these aspects of my life, that it can be kind of condemning; but to look at it in another way, it can be an inspiration. It can inspire us to consider, 'What can we do better to serve our Lord?' As I was I was thinking about Christ, I was also thinking about, what can I do? These are great times - times that many people would have wanted to live if they had

a choice - times when all of this knowledge was around - times when Christ would come again. What can I do in my life? What sacrifices can I make?

"We all know some of the things we can do, and I would just like to talk about a few. The first thing I remembered is that we need to be prepared. My grandfather used to talk a lot about my great grandfather, who was J.J. Cornish. On one particular occasion a man stood up and said that of all the great and marvelous miracles and things that happened to J.J. Cornish, the greatest, by far, was the miracle that changed his life so that he was always prepared to serve. The greatest thing that can happen in our lives is that we are changed so that we are prepared at all times to serve the Lord. If we are not prepared, the Lord cannot use us. So a man like J.J. Cornish, or whoever, was prepared at all times - ready to go so he didn't have to sit down and repent first. Whatever it was, he was ready when the Lord called him.

"Along with the need to be prepared, I was thinking about study. Where we live down in Texas, I see a great need for that. Because there are so few Saints, it is also a pleasure to be here today. This is at least three or four times the amount of people we get to meet with every Sunday. Down there where the numbers are so few, there aren't as many people to rely on, to trust and to talk with about the scriptures, because most people are different from you. So it's important to be founded on the scriptures.

"To me, there are two different aspects to study, and I relate this to my field. I am a graduate student, and I work for a professor, a principal investigator. At one point the principal investigator was a student as well, and he had to study and do research in the lab. But at some point, when he graduated and got his position as a professor, he got graduate students under him. So eventually, he stopped doing research and has all his graduate students do the research for him. While the professor knows what's going on, he wouldn't be able to go out into the lab and actually perform one of the experiments. Like I recently heard one of my friends say, his professor was trained as an organic chemist twenty years ago. Because he was an organic chemist doesn't mean he is an organic chemist today because he hasn't been practicing on it. The analogy here is that we can know the scriptures, but if they are not active in our life, something is wrong. We need to know the scriptures and we need to have them active in our lives. Even somebody who is not religious and doesn't believe in Christ can know the scriptures, and can quote them just as well as we can. But the important thing here is that we need to know the scriptures and we need to practice them so that when somebody asks us to help them in their lives, we can say, 'This is how it works in our lives.'

"Another thing that we need down in Texas is hope. Hope is something we often don't talk about, but it is something we need probably more than just about anything. I remember talking to another graduate student in our lab. She is borderline between atheism and non-atheism and her husband is an atheist. We were talking about how there is no hope for somebody who doesn't believe in God. If you don't believe in God, there is nothing after you die. There is nothing left, so what is the purpose of life? Nothing! But for those of us who believe in God and in the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ, we have hope. And this brings an excitement in our lives and a desire to do good. Last week, in a sermon by Clay Renfroe, he was talking about people who continue to strive to be better. We realize that we are inadequate and do a lot of things that are wrong, but he pointed out that there were several people in the scriptures who did many things in their lives that were

wrong, but they continued to strive to be better. There was David. No matter what setback he had, he had that hope and that desire that made it possible for him always to be better. That's the hope we need.

“ In addition to that hope, we have the hope that Jesus Christ will return. And we have been promised in the scriptures that Zion will come. The Everlasting Covenant in the book of Genesis, and many other scriptures tell us that Zion will come, and that Christ will come again. Back in the early seventies, our grandfather said that on several occasions he spoke under the influence of the Spirit and told people in the congregation that they would be alive when Zion would come again. And in moments of weakness, he told his wife that he was glad that there were young people in that congregation because it was so far off. But I believe what was true then is true today that there are - hopefully all of us in this congregation will be alive when Zion comes again. The important thing for us to do is to decide what side we are going to be on - among those who will be ready when Zion comes or those that won't.

“Another thing that is important to me is prayer. I am told in the seventeenth section of the Doctrine and Covenants that as a Priest, I am to implore people to pray publicly and in private. Prayer is very important, and sometimes we take it lightly. Sometimes we save it just for a night time activity; but we need to pray continuously.

“All of these things are important for us now. We need to be prepared. We need to have hope. We need to pray. If we have hope, we have that desire and drive to keep going. And if we pray He will grant us to do those things that we desire. We need to study. If we know the scriptures, the Scriptures say we will not be deceived in the last day.

“The groups in Texas are small. There are many groups in different cities, and Erin and I have met with a lot of them. In our meetings and conversations, there is a feeling that there is a yearning and a desire for unifying the people - for all of us to be gathered together. It's interesting because when I was born and raised in Houston, and after the Restoration was started, we met in small groups and it was almost like we were isolated. As I remember, my father was in the Priesthood the whole time we lived in Houston, and he was never really asked to go preach to Bryan where College Station is or Austin, Dallas-Fort Worth or Marlin. He was never asked to go to any of these different places in Texas, and I don't think there was much training of Priesthood. Now it seems that more people are realizing that we need other people, and so there are traveling ministers that are going from place to place. Neil Simmons is down in Dallas and he is trying to do a lot of things down there. We are all trying to gather together and gather strength from each other. I feel that in Texas there is a great movement of the Spirit gathering us all together, and I feel that things are coming close to the end.

“We need to be thankful today that God loved us so much that he sent his only begotten Son that through Him we might receive salvation. So let's not forget the focus of today, no matter what other things I might have said. The focus for today is the Communion. We are gathered together to partake of the Lord's Supper, and our focus in that is Jesus Christ. Two weeks ago I heard Neil Simmons say that the focus of his ministry is Jesus Christ. The foundation of his ministry is Jesus Christ. Every thing that he says or does is about Jesus Christ. Similarly, today, I would like to remind us that this is about Jesus Christ. As the blessing is read on the bread and the wine, and as we partake, let us remember the covenant we made in baptism and through the confirmation of the Holy Spirit. Let us

remember those times and remember to continue to strive to be a better person, to be a better people, to be a better church, and to always look for ways to reach out to others around us and to bring them the good news of the gospel.

“So my prayer today is that we will be more prepared so the Lord can use us, and that we will continue to have hope in Christ that truly these are the end times. If we are going to be among those five who have oil in their lamps when the Lord comes, we need to do this. And my prayer is that God will be with us, He will strengthen us and we will be a better people.”

Humility, the Key to Endowment

Patriarch-Evangelist Verle Cornish chose two scriptures for a setting for his sermon of December 8.

Matthew 18:1-5 tells the story of the time Christ's disciples were asking who was the greatest in the Kingdom of God. Jesus called a little child to them, set it in the midst of them and said, “Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoso shall receive one such child in my name, receiveth me. Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believeth in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

From Mosiah 1:119-120, “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been, from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever; but if he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man, and becometh a Saint, through the atonement of Christ, the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.”

Brother Cornish first commented on his fear, as a newly ordained young man, of being asked to preach following someone like Arthur Oakman or Evan Fry for whom he had great respect. Now, he said, “I have the difficult problem of following my son, who I understand stood here last week.”

“Probably the focus of my ministry for at least the last four or five years has been to try to create an environment, a spiritual condition, that would allow God's people to draw so very close to Him that their lives would be such that they would be perfect by the dealings of the Spirit of God in them. Really, it's all so simple if we would just allow God's Spirit to dwell completely and totally within our souls. Everything would take care of itself. We would become that people among those who would be endowed . We would become that people God would use to redeem His Zion. We would become those people who would find ourselves in the Kingdom of God. I believe that, as was read in the scripture from Doctrine and Covenants 102 this morning, there are just two conditions necessary for the endowment of the Priesthood. One is obedience or faithfulness. The other is humility.

Brother Cornish chose to read a statement about humility and the way he feels about it because, he said, “I want to make sure that it is given in the proper way.”

“Humility is the key that unlocks the door to the spiritual blessings of God. And God trusts His power to those who recognize that He

is the source of all power. He cannot trust us with His power until we have humbled ourselves even into the depths of humility. The sincerity and depth of our repentance is directly proportionate to the depth of our humility. Being humble is the same as being in the attitude of repentance.”

“Saints, there is absolutely no substitute for humility. No matter how gifted we may think we are, no matter how beautiful a voice might be, no matter how well anyone may stand and preach or teach a class, there is absolutely no reason for any pride. And I declare to you today that without the Spirit and the power of God, no ministry is given and no ministry is received. Humility is the key.

Sometimes We Are Compelled To Be Humble

“Unfortunately, there have been too many times in my life when I have been compelled to be humble. I suppose there are a few, maybe very few, in this audience this morning, who could stand and declare that your humility has been a natural consequence of your belief in God and your feasting upon the words of Christ. But, unfortunately, much of my humility is the result of my disobedience. And if we look at our lives and we see within them those things which have evidenced in unrighteousness or sin, I think the Lord loves us very dearly when He allows us to suffer the consequences of our sin immediately - not having to wait for many years before we pay the consequence for that which we have done. For this we should praise Him. No matter the reason that humility comes into our lives, it must come into our lives or we cannot have part in the Kingdom of God. We must become, even as the scriptures which I read this morning declare, as little children.

Sally Cornish, Verle’s wife, teaches second grade at CPRS, and Verle sometimes listens in or hears stories of what occurs there. Sally often tells him about those children, how precious they are, how much faith they have, and how important their Heavenly Father is to them. Some of those stories, Verle shared with us along with stories of children in Australia, a place in which he ministered the last two years in row.

Last January when he was in Australia, there were two contrasting little girls. Both were young, blond haired, about the age of twelve and truly precious and beautiful. Both of whom came to the Reunion with their grandparents. Because of what has happened in the church, their parents had fallen away. The first little girl was named Cherise and said to her grandmother, ‘I want to be in the prebaptismal class.’ Her grandmother said to her, ‘Why would you want to do that? You know you can’t be baptized. Your parents won’t let you.’ She insisted that she wanted to be in the prebaptismal class and learn about Christ’s church. In the final service of the Reunion, Verle was preaching. “The Lord spoke to that little girl and said, ‘Because of the desires of your heart, your desire to be faithful unto the Lord and obey His commandments, the Lord will soften the hearts of your parents, and soon you will be allowed to do that which you desire to be a part of His church, as will your sister.’”

“The other little girl came with her grandmother. Before she came, she says, ‘Grandmother, I don’t know if I am going to enjoy this because, I don’t know if I even believe in God.’ On Tuesday afternoon this young lady fell and hit her leg on a rock and got a pretty deep cut on her leg that was going to require stitches. Before they took her to the hospital, they administered to her. In the prayer of confirmation, the Elder asked that the bleeding stop and the pain be removed. The little girl went, got her stitches, came back and said to her grandmother, ‘Grandma, ever since those men prayed for me, I have not felt any pain. And you know, my leg stopped bleeding then. I think that I believe in God.’ We need to become as little

children.

“In Sally’s classroom a couple of years ago, one of the young men, (I call them young men. If they are going to be baptized, certainly they are young men, are they not?) had gone away to Woodbine, Iowa to be baptized by his Grandfather. He had played in the woods and had gotten poison ivy. When he came back, they were in the midst of taking Iowa tests, and he was itching himself all over. He was really in distress. So he said, ‘Mrs. Cornish, can I go see the nurse?’ Sally said, ‘Really, we don’t have time for that. We are in the middle of this timed test. But we do have time for mighty prayer.’ So she asked her class, ‘Is there anyone in this class who would be willing to offer mighty prayer for this boy?’ One young man raised his hand. He and the children got down on their knees, and he offered a prayer that Sally described as the prayer of confirmation of an administration might be. It was given to him by the Lord by the Spirit of God. It was answered. That boy never itched again from that poison ivy.

“Another young girl was having such terrible bad headaches. By the middle of the afternoon, she would have to go lay down in the nurse’s office until her parents were ready to come after school to take her home. So Sally asked the kids if they wanted to fast and pray for this young girl. And even though it doesn’t sound like much, they fasted their snack as a class, and during that time they would pray in preparation for the Elders coming into that class room and administering to this young girl. Two Elders came in, I was there. I didn’t participate in the administration, but I prayed ahead of time. Those two Elders laid their hands upon her head and asked that she be healed, and she was. Is God not going to honor the faith of a child? And if we become as little children, will He not honor our faith and our desire to be righteous and true and holy? I think He will!

“As I mentioned earlier, there have been too many times in my life that I have done things that I have done things that I am not proud of at all.” Our speaker spoke especially of his busy schedule. For the last two weeks the family has been moving. During the last four weeks he has preached seven times and has given a few blessings. “I can never, that I can remember, ever said, ‘No.’ to any one who has asked me to bring ministry; but there have been too many times when I haven’t brought ministry when the Lord’s Spirit had instructed me to do so, for which I had to repent; but many times I could not change the consequences. I stand responsible for the sins that were committed when that ministry was not brought, as it is with all of our Priesthood. Humility, then, is the key that unlocks the spiritual blessings of God.

What Will It Take?

“What will it take for each of us to have this Spirit dwell within our hearts forever? First and foremost, we must repent of all of our sins. Brother Rolfe made mention of the fact that there are a lot of hidden sins that are within each of us. No one knows of those sins but God and ourselves. And sometimes, we have forgotten those sins because we have grown older and can no longer do the things we used to do when we were younger. And we need to repent of all of our sins. We must seek to eliminate from our lives those faults that are there.

“The scriptures tell us that we should confess our faults. It doesn’t say to confess openly our sin and let everybody know what we have done, but we should confess our faults. We had a prayer service at Hill Cumorah Restoration Branch, where we attend, and one morning I just decided to do an experiment. So in the beginning of the service, I asked the people, if they were brave enough, to

share with the congregation one of their faults, and I would start. You cannot imagine the spirit of humility that came over that congregation as they stood up one by one and confessed their faults. When that was finished and those who had confessed their faults to the degree that they would, I turned to prayer. I said, 'Now, let us pray that the faults of those individuals be eliminated from their lives.' And I asked, 'What would happen if I had asked you to pray for the faults of others and you had prayed specifically for a fault that you knew someone else had? They would be offended, but if they had confessed their fault, would they be offended if you prayed for them? No, they would not.' So a part of the spirit of humility that enters into our lives is our willingness to confess that we do have faults and that we of ourselves, cannot remove them from our lives except with the help of God.

"We must be willing to give up everything that cannot be taken into the Kingdom of God. And if there are things in our lives now that we are participating in that we know absolutely cannot be part of the Kingdom of the Kingdom of God, we need to eliminate them from our lives now to demonstrate to God that we are willing to do whatever it takes to be a part of His Kingdom.

"We must increasingly impart of our substance to those who stand in need. Our congregation has just gone through an experience with a young family - mother and I think four daughters all together. One of the daughters, the youngest one, was in Sally's class two years ago. And at CPRS, I may be a little ashamed to say this, if you don't have the money, which is not that much - a dollar and a half for a student lunch, if you don't have the money, you get to eat peanut butter and bread. So this family of girls had been eating peanut butter and bread because their mother, who worked overnight at Toys-R-Us stocking the shelves, couldn't afford the lunches. Someone decided to put up a hundred and ten dollars, which was enough to pay for the lunches for those girls for a month. So one afternoon after this had occurred, this girl that had been in my wife's class came up to her and showed her her meal ticket. She said, 'Look, Mrs. Cornish, I get to eat!' She wasn't bitter. She wasn't angry. She was thankful. Shame on us! So Sally took this back to our women's department and our women's department put up all the money for the remainder of the year for them to have lunch and provided them a table full of food that you could not even comprehend for Thanksgiving and will do it again for Christmas. You know, some of the items given her, she couldn't use, so she gave those things to her neighbors because they stood in need also. Is this not a part of what Zion is all about?

"Last Thursday night, Sally and I drove this little girl to her home, about 5 or 6 blocks from school, so she wouldn't have to walk in the cold. She didn't have a winter coat. You should see the home that she lives in. It can't be more than two or three, four rooms at the most - very poor condition. How can we accept the comfortable conditions in which we live when there are those who love the Lord who stand in need?

"We must be willing to forgive each other of our trespasses and their trespasses, and we must set our own homes in order. There's a scripture in the 28th section of the Doctrine and Covenants to which I expect every one of us has been disobedient. That scripture says, 'I give a commandment to you that you shall fast and pray from this time on.' That means that it is not enough if we fast and pray for something specific. Then we say, 'That's wonderful. The Blessings came, so now we can take a little break.' It means we continue to fast and to pray continually for the remainder of our lives. If we cannot be obedient to this commandment, we cannot

expect the blessings from God that that kind of obedience will bring.

Testimonies of Blessings to Humble People

"There is a man in our congregation whose name is Bob Handy. Bob Handy's father, who died of cancer, owned a metal plating business when he was younger, and his children worked in there. Being the industrial hygienist supervisor for the state of Kansas, I can imagine what the hazards of heavy metals are. So Bob, who is fifty nine years of age, developed cancer and has it throughout his whole body. We decided as a congregation that we wanted to fast and pray for him. We would come together on a Wednesday night and that service would be dedicated to the administration that would take place for Brother Bob at that service. I had been asked to confirm at that administration, so I had about a week to live with that.

On the Sunday before the Wednesday that we were to come together, I went to Brother Bob and I said, 'Bob, what blessing do you want?' He said to me, 'I'm willing to accept the will of the Lord.' I said, 'I know that. That's not good enough. What do you want?' He said to me, 'My son and his wife are having their first child after three miscarriages. It's due in about three months. I'd love to hold that baby in my arms and bless it in the ordinance of baby blessing.' So we came together on that Wednesday evening, and I want to share with you something that was absolutely present in virtually every single prayer that was offered. As the Saints stood up to pray, they asked that God would forgive them of their sins and that their sins would not interfere with the blessing for Brother Bob. The administration came and I asked for that blessing which I believe had been given me of the Lord. That blessing was not that he be healed, but that he be restored to full strength and health as though he were healed, and that he be given a period of time in the will of the Lord to accomplish those righteous desires that he had in his heart to do, one of which was bless that grand baby.

Two weeks later Bob called me up on the telephone and said, 'Brother Verle, I am sorry it has taken me so long to get back to you, but I wanted you to know that the morning after the administration took place, I woke up and realized that I didn't have any pain. I had not been without pain for ten years!' The week before he had got his PSA through his doctor, and it was 78. Normal is 2-4, six if you happen to be a little older. It was 78! In the blood test after the administration it was 2, but it wasn't healed. He received a blessing. His prayer had been answered. I was in Kingsville the morning that the baby was blessed. I told Bob, 'Bob, I'm angry with you. He asked, 'Why?'. I said, 'Well, I'm pleased with you that you chose your baby to be blessed on our son's birthday, but I'm angry that I won't be able to be there.' Of course, I wasn't really angry. We don't know how long Bob will last, but I know it will be long enough for any of those righteous desires that he has in the time frame of the Lord are.

"I want to tell you a little bit now about Hill Cumorah congregation and what we are doing. Our new Pastor is Glen Brown, from Wisconsin. He gathered to Independence about two years ago and chose our congregation, I guess, partly because of me, and is now our Pastor. He heard someone talking about Hill Cumorah saying, 'They are fairly spiritual over there.' Glen said, 'Inside of me, I was offended by the word fairly - not that we were more spiritual than fairly, but because we weren't. I want our congregation to become so spiritual and close to the Lord that the Lord can use us in whatever fashion he chooses to use us as individuals and as a branch.' And so, he, with his counselors invited

THE Gift - The Real Meaning of Christmas

me to come along and we sat down to talk about what we could do to raise the spiritual level of the congregation of our people. We have embarked on a spiritual growth program that involves many of the elements that we have talked about today, one of which most specifically is that we would begin to enter into a season of fasting and prayer for a specific purpose for the remainder of our lives.

We have taken several scriptures which are the promises of God, and I suggested that we read these scriptures every day for the rest of our lives. So the previous Pastor's wife put them all on a small sheet of paper and passed them out through the congregation to make it easy for us to read these scriptures every day and be able to believe and to trust in those promises that God has given us. The tremendous blessings that are there! 'I, the Lord, delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and truth, and great shall be their reward, and eternal shall be their glory and unto them will I reveal all mysteries.' Are those the kind of promises you would like to have fulfilled in your life? I would, and much more than I have ever been close to; but I can't do that unless I'm ready to give everything that I have.

"One final experience that happened at Graceland at the first Missionary reunion. I was sitting in the service where Royal Roden was preaching. All of a sudden there came over that congregation of people, at least to me, the spirit of extreme humility. The Spirit of humility was there in great abundance. The Lord began to open up my eyes, and I began to see myself as He sees me - through His eyes. What I saw was ugly, and I heard a voice speak to my mind, and the voice said, 'When are you going to give your whole soul unto me that I might cleanse you of all unrighteousness, that you might become that person that I have desired for you to be, even from the foundation of the world - that you might accomplish those things that I will intrust to you as you remain faithful before me.' "So this morning the question really for all of us, is it not, 'When are we going to give our whole souls to Jesus Christ?'

"I am reminded of the experience that was referenced by Mike's song this morning. When Mary had considered all the angel Gabriel had said - she thought about it and made her own choice - she said unto God, 'May it be unto me according to your will!' Are we willing to make that statement this morning? There is a promise in Section 94 of the Doctrine and Covenants beginning with 2f. 'Verily I say unto you, All among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice, yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command, they all are accepted of me, for I, the Lord, will cause them to bring forth as a very fruitful tree which is planted in a goodly land, by a pure stream, that yieldeth much precious fruit.' If your heart is honest, broken and contrite, God will plant you in Zion and bring forth out of your life, the fruit meet for repentance in the Kingdom of Zion.

"One last statement - the Lord is soon to move. The time will shortly come when He raises up someone who will bring together all of the factions of the Restoration. There will be one united Restoration Gospel church, which is the church referred to as the Church of God in the Book of Mormon. There will no longer be Mormons or RLDS or Institutional. None of that will be. There will be one church under God. It will be endowed and Zion will be!

Seventy Ronald Smith began his sermon Sunday, December 15 by explaining the scripture he was about to read. "This morning I would like to read from Luke the first chapter, and the reading I have chosen has to do with Zacharias' prophecy about his son, who is known to us as John the Baptist. Of course, John's mission was to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. Since this is right before Christmas, I thought it would be an appropriate thing to talk about. But in his prophecy, Zacharias talks about Jesus as well. So listen to the part that he is saying about Jesus, and then when he addresses his son, I hope that will be clear to you.

Luke 1:67- "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He has visited and has redeemed His people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us, in the house of His servant David, as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, ever since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and, from the hand of all those who hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives. "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by baptism for the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them who sit in darkness and the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Gifts For Sharing

Ron announced that he would like to talk about gifts. He asked the children what they thought the best thing about Christmas was. The first response was an enthusiastic, "Giving!" the second was, "Jesus' Birth!" Others were, "Giving presents!", "Jesus' love!" and the youngest said, "Opening the presents."

"Last night several of you were at the MSC where we had an evening of songs and scriptures and good food. It was really nice. Those of you who weren't there missed a real treat, and it reminded me of a time when we had gone to the Christmas Tree lighting at Graceland a few years ago and Santa Claus (There was no Santa there last night. Just praises.) came up and asked, "What's the real meaning of Christmas?" One of Brad Carr's sons said, "Jesus Christ! The birth of Jesus!" Whoever it was who was playing Santa said, 'Well, well, but what's the REAL meaning of Christmas, trying to get out of him that it was about gifts and giving; but the boy held his ground, and I was really proud of him, because a lot of people don't distinguish between the gifts of Christmas and the GIFT of Christmas that was Jesus Christ. You and I know that the real meaning of Christmas is the gift that God gave to us which was Jesus Christ. And that's the gift I would like to talk about, although I will talk about a couple of other gifts first.

"When I was really little, sometime before I was in second grade, we lived in Hawaii. In the front window of the drug store there was a big treasure chest full of toys. To be in the contest for the chest, all one had to do was just to sign up for the drawing. Whoever's name got drawn would win that whole treasure chest full of toys. It was exciting for us, and we all got signed up. Shortly

before Christmas they called to tell me that I had won. Boy did that make me feel special because that treasure chest of toys was full of stuff. It had a big, pink panda bear. It seemed like it was that big (and our speaker gestured), but I suppose I was pretty small then and it seemed bigger than it was, but it was a big panda bear. It had a battery operated crane, and it had just all kinds of toys. To me that was just amazing!

“That year there was a family from the other side of the island by the name of Gay. Roy, the father was out of work. Mom and Dad had invited the Gay family to come and be with us for Christmas. They had a number of kids, I’m not sure how many, but they had twin girls about my age and some other kids. Because he was out of work, they didn’t have any presents.

“Mom suggested to me that maybe the reason that we had gotten these gifts was so that we could share them. I thought that was a pretty good idea. I gave the panda bear to the twins, and I let everybody in the neighborhood choose what they wanted. One of the guys next door found the battery operated crane. He liked that, so he got that. By the time everybody was finished getting their presents, there wasn’t very much left in the treasure chest; but there was a small set of Presidents, and I still remember that set. That was my present. You know, sometimes the reason that we have gifts given to us is so we can share them with others. That probably was better than if I had kept all of that whole treasure chest of toys for myself, because I have long since grown out of the need for toys, but the need to give and to share, you never get over that. You never grow out of that, and that’s a part of what Christmas is all about.

“But I’d like to go back to the scripture that I talked about this morning and talk about the Big Gift of Christmas which was mentioned by several here when we asked about what the true meaning of Christmas was. The big gift of Christmas was the gift that God gave of His Son, Jesus to come and give us the gift of salvation.

Forgiveness and Remission - Are they the Same?

“As I was reading preparing for the sermon, I noticed something that- you know how you read these things through the years and suddenly the light comes on and you see it? This is verse 76 where Zacharias is prophesying about his son, John’s purpose in life. John is to go before the face of the Lord to prepare His way, ‘to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by Baptism for the remission of their sins’. It occurred to me to look that up in the King James version. It doesn’t say anything about baptism. It says ‘salvation of the people by the remission of their sins’.

“I have thought about the remission of sins quite a bit lately, and to me it seems there is quite a difference between forgiveness of sins and remission of sins. We have used those two words interchangeably, and so we think of them kind of in the same way. So I would like to share with you, perhaps an insight that may give some insight into the difference between remission and forgiveness of sins. Perhaps it will help you understand both a little bit better. “Let’s talk about money first, since we understand money and debt. When you get a bill in the mail, they want you to remit the bill. When you remit the bill, what do you do with the bill? You send it back with the payment. Remit comes from the Latin. Re means back, and mittere means to give (or send). You give back that which is owed. So when you remit something, you actually pay it, and it is gone. It is no longer a bill because it has been sent back with the money. It has been paid.

“There is a difference between that and forgiving a debt. If I owe my mother some money and she says, ‘Oh, it’s Christmas time

and we’ll just write that debt off. You won’t owe that anymore.’ That’s forgiving my debt. When there is forgiveness, there is no payment. When there is remission, there is payment, and that’s the difference I would like to suggest that there is between remission and forgiveness of sins. If God was sitting up in heaven, or having some of His angels do it for Him like we sometimes think, watching, and whenever we are talking in church, or playing with things, or doing things wrong, they write it down in a book. And you have a big page and have more and more written down because, as we go, we commit more sins and they get all this written down. If that was what sin was about, then all it would take to forgive sins would be just to tear up the page. Forget it! Remember it no more or blot it all out. And that sometimes is the image we have in our mind, that for God it’s just a matter of forgiving our sins. In fact, many Christians say that God has already forgotten all about them, so it doesn’t matter as long as we will allow Him to erase the page, He’ll erase it, and everything will be fine - there is no payment. Everything will be forgiven.

“But there are some indications to me in the scriptures that that’s not the way it really works. I know that I have talked about this before, and perhaps, If I talk about it again, it may make sense sometime in the way it seems to me to make sense.

Laws -Physical and Spiritual

“We have a spiritual part of us and a physical part of us. We are very much aware of the physical part of us, but we are not aware of the spiritual part of us in the same way. God has put laws in the universe. If I cut my hand so it bleeds, something has to be done about that. Right? If I cut my hand for whatever reason, and it bleeds, what has to happen? One of the things that has to happen is that there is pain and that there is healing. Eventually it will heal and there will be a scar, unless the wound is too deep or unless the hurt is too much, in which case it causes death. Well, why does God do that? Why does He allow that pain? Why does He make it so that when we cut ourselves we have pain? Wouldn’t it have been a lot simpler if He had just done away with pain? Some people say, “Yes.”

“You know, there are people who don’t experience pain, and there are some diseases which attack the nerves and there is no pain. I have seen pictures on television of some leprosy colonies in the Philippines, and when you look at the people, they are missing their nose or their fingers or their foot or something. They are very disfigured. But when I learned about leprosy, I found out that it’s not leprosy that makes their nose fall off, or their fingers of toes. What happens is it’s a bacterial infection that attacks and kills the nerves, and once it kills the nerves they don’t feel any pain anymore. They don’t feel that their hand is their own, and so if they cut it, their body doesn’t react to that cut. Unless they see it’s cut, they don’t know that it’s cut, and they don’t know to take care of it, because it doesn’t hurt. Eventually other diseases come in and make the nose or fingers or whatever fall off, because they are just not perceived as their own. Pain is that connection that we have with our bodies that tells us that something is wrong. God set it up that way so that we could, under certain circumstances heal. (Ron spoke to a child with a broken arm saying, ‘Your bone is going to get better, isn’t it? Yes, It’s going to heal.’) And even though there is pain in between, it is to muster our body’s defenses against those injuries.

“Well, God put lots of laws into the universe, and one of those laws has to do with falling off a cliff. If you come to the edge of a cliff and move out, you are going to get hurt. You are going to do damage to yourself, and if you fall off far enough, you are going to

get killed. Right? Now, God made that law of gravity, not just so we would fall off cliffs and get hurt. He put the law of gravity here so we would have an earth, a sun, an atmosphere, and all of the things that make life possible. All are there because of the law of gravity. We have to understand that when we ignore the law of gravity, when we go against it, there are going to be consequences. There is going to be pain. There is going to be hurt, and if it's to great, we will even die.

“The same thing happens with the spiritual laws. The scriptures tell us that God makes no temporal laws. They are all spiritual laws to God. He has made spiritual laws and we have spirits within us, but we are dead to that spirit in the same way as we are when our mouths are deadened to pain before the dentist drills on a tooth to repair it. In the same way, we are dead to the spirit we have or the pain our spirits go through. God has given us laws to try to help us so we won't injure our spirits; but we go from the time we are born until the time we die, mangling our spirits; because we think that if we just tell a little lie, it's not going to hurt us much. Right? If we tell a little lie, it may help us. If we steal just a little bit, maybe -; maybe if we are mean to our sister, it may make us feel better; maybe if we talk back to our parents, that will enhance our stature, or something. We could go on and on with all those things that we do, and we never understand what it is doing to our spirits.

“And yet there are consequence of those things. It's just like cutting our spirits. There has to be healing. There has to be pain or we don't understand that. And the scriptures say that the time will come when we will have a perfect remembrance of everything that has ever happened, and we will know as we are known. We will, I believe, after we die, have that experience of being awakened once again to spiritual pain and all of the pain that we have inflicted upon ourselves will be present and alive; and that presence and aliveness to our pain, some have called hell. It's described that way in the Book of Mormon where it talks about the anguish of understanding what we have done to ourselves. Even though God can't look on sin with the least degree of allowance - no unclean thing can dwell in the presence of God, He has made it possible for us to give our sins to Jesus. He has made it possible to lay on Jesus the iniquity of us all. I believe that the gift of remission of sins is not that there is just going to be forgiveness - that God's going to turn His back and say, 'Oh, it doesn't matter. I won't remember that any more.

“The remission of sins involves payment, but it's not going to be you or I who is going to pay. It will be Jesus Christ, and when Zacharias was prophesying about his son, John the Baptist, going out into Judea, he said that John would bring the knowledge of salvation to his people by baptism for the remission of sins. The Jews, you see, believed in baptism, but they thought the only people that had to be baptized were non-Jews. People who were not Jews already would have to be baptized in order to become Jewish. If they wanted to become Jews, they could do that with baptism. But John went out and said, 'No! You need to be baptized for the remission of your sins, and he said that even the Jewish people had to do that. And Jesus, as you recall, came to John and said, 'John, I have need to be baptized.' John says, 'Oh, no you don't. I need to be baptized of you, not the other way around'. John said it because this was the one he had prophesied about and said He was going to take away the sins of the world. But Jesus said, 'It needs to be done in order to fulfill all righteousness.' So Jesus, himself, was baptized, and the Holy Ghost came and rested upon Him and bore record that He was the Son of God.

“Well, God will not take away the pain of sin unless we let Him.

That's one of those things that God has said from the very beginning. He won't take it away unless we decide that that's what we want. And if we decide that that's what we want, He says, we can be baptized for the remission of our sins. Isaiah in the fifty third chapter, talks about this. He says, 'Who has believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.' What is Isaiah talking about? Most of us would identify that clearly as Jesus Christ, but what does it mean that he has no beauty that we would desire him, no comeliness that we would desire? “Well, Isaiah says, 'When we shall see him'. That may be saying that Jesus was really an ugly baby, but I don't think so. I think that when we see Jesus and we are aware of our spirits, and we see Jesus as God sees Him, he's going to be scarred and marked up because He is going to bear all of our sins and iniquities. And we are going to know why He looks like that, because, as he says, 'Surely he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him stricken and smitten of God, but He was wounded for our transgressions. It wasn't that God reached down to punish him or to torture him or to do any of those things. 'He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.'

“It goes on to talk about those things that Jesus took upon himself, and it talks about his death in the flesh. But His death in the flesh was only part of the story, because, I believe, He took on Him in His spirit our damage that we do, and for those who are baptized for the remission of sins, salvation is possible - coming back into the presence of God. Though our sins be as scarlet, yet they shall be white as snow. And we can stand before God pure.

“In the Book of Mormon the prophet Nephi talked about this. In the sixth chapter of Second Nephi, he says, 'If you were holy, you wouldn't need me to tell you about the effects of sin.' I thought for a long time - I don't know what holy meant to me. It was just a word that I heard a lot. Nephi said, 'If you were holy, you wouldn't need me to talk about your sins and the consequence of your sinning; but because you are not holy, you need me to tell you about the consequence of sin.' And he goes on to tell the people about that. I think it means, if we were alive to our spirits - if we understood our spirits and the damage that the sinning does to those spirits, we wouldn't need him to tell us about the consequences of sin any more than we need somebody to tell us about the consequences of falling off a cliff. We understand that. It's clear because we understand physical things. But he says, 'Because you are not holy, you need me to tell you about the consequences of sin'.

“We live in a day and age when people don't believe in sin. They don't believe that there is anything that God has said that has anything to do with our bodies or how we conduct ourselves - our lives, and that's gaining ground in all kinds of places. But God said, 'I've told you, and I will tell you again. I have warned you and forewarned you because I know of the calamities coming, I know the hearts of conspiring men in the last days. I'm telling you what to do with your bodies. I'm telling you that it does make a difference whether you go out and have sex with people before or outside of marriage. I'm telling you it does make a difference what you put into your bodies. It does make a difference whether you put drugs in your bodies that are harmful. It does make a difference how you

eat. It does make a difference how you live with your brothers and sisters. It does make a difference how you treat your parents and whether you honor them. It does make a difference whether you lie, whether you steal. It does make a difference!

“John went out saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ And he said that salvation would come by the remission of sins - salvation would come, if the Inspired Version is to be believed, through baptism for the remission of sins. This is the way that Jesus has said that we can be holy before God - that we can come into His presence without the effects - without the marks, without the consequences of those sins; but only because they have been remitted. Only because it is Jesus Christ who has done the healing - who has gone through the pain and the suffering so that we might stand whole before God.

“That’s THE GIFT, folks! That’s the true meaning of Christmas! And so, as you give your gifts and as you receive your gifts, and yes, even as you open your presents this Christmas, (Ron spoke directly to the little one who had said opening her presents was the best thing about Christmas) you need to remember THE gift - the one gift that God has given that gave Christmas its meaning - the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ His Son.

Christ’s Birthday Celebrated

The service of December 22 was a celebration of the birth of Jesus directed by Elder Michael Jordison. Following a medley of Christmas hymns played at the piano by Jan Jordison, little Sarah Bentley, granddaughter of Jim and Linda Barber, played “We Three Kings”, completing the prelude. Following the welcome and announcements, the congregation sang, “Angels We Have Heard On High”.

We were further called to worship by the reading of the scripture chronicling the birth of Jesus, Matthew 2:1-6. When the announcement was read, “They shall call his name Emmanuel, ... God with us”, Michael paused in his reading and, from the back of the room, Barbra Jordison sang stanzas from the song, “Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel. ... Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to Thee, O Israel.” Then Michael resumed reading from Isaiah 9:6-7:

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulders; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.”

Yvonne Galusha, accompanied by her daughter Cessarries, sang “O Holy Night.” Lynda Rolfe read a poem written by her mother, Cecil Probst, that told in rhyme the story of Mary and her acceptance of the ministry required of her in the birth of Jesus. The congregation sang, “While shepherds watched their flocks in Bethlehem’s fields by night, an angel sent from heaven appeared and filled the field with light.”

Mildred Smith told of the miraculous conversion of a wronged and angry man to love and peace by the gift of Christmas. Ron and Di Smith sang,

“Who would send a baby, a tiny child, to heal a world in pain? ... to light a world with love? ... to bless the world with peace? When the world is crying for the Promised One, who would send His only Son?”

Gordon Winkler gathered the children around his chair where he held a copy of the story Linda was reading of the “Legend of the Candy Cane.” As Linda read, Gordon showed the pictures to the children. According to the story, held one way, the cane is shaped like a J to remind us of Jesus. Held the other way, it represents a shepherd’s crook, Jesus the Good Shepherd. The red stripes remind us that with His stripes we are healed, and the white stripes tell us that it is with His blood that our sins are washed white as snow.

It was the second time that Sunday that the children had been called to the front to see and hear a Christmas story. At the morning worship Valle Smith had read a story, said to be based on a true happening, in which God used a long series of what seemed misfortunes to a young boy to bring together an old woman and an old man, man and wife, separated by Hitler’s Holocaust many years before. For the boy, it was a glorious awakening to the wisdom and mercy of God - a blessed Christmas!

The children, under the direction of Barbra Jordison and with Jazmyn Galusha soloing, sang a beautiful praise song, the chorus of which declares:

“Jesus is the Savior. Jesus is God’s Son.

Boys and girls sing joy to the world.

He has come for everyone.”

Sue Beck followed with her worshipful interpretation of the familiar, “Silent Night”.

Alan Smith read the gripping story of the tragedies in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s life that brought into being the beautiful Carol, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”. The story, as written by Michael Jordison follows:

Christmas Bells

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The great American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a poem which since his death, has been set to music and has become one of America’s favorite carols. That poem is “Christmas Bells.”

As with any composition that touches the heart of the hearer, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” flowed from the experience, of Longfellow -- involving the tragic death of his wife, Fanny, and the crippling injury of his son, Charles, from war wounds.

Henry had married Frances Appleton in 1843, and they settled down in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where they eventually had five children. Tragedy struck both the nation and the Longfellow family in 1861. Confederate Gen. Pierre G. T. Beauregard fired the opening salvos of the American Civil War on April 12th, and Fanny Longfellow was fatally burned in an accident in their library.

After trimming some of their seven year old Edith’s beautiful curls, Fanny decided to preserve the clippings in sealing wax. Melting a bar of the sealing wax with a candle, a few drops fell unnoticed upon her dress. The sea breeze gusted through the window, igniting the light material of Fanny’s dress-- immediately wrapping her in flames. In her attempt to protect the children, Edith and Allegra, she ran to Henry’s study in the next room, where Henry frantically attempted to extinguish the flames with a nearby, but undersized throw rug. Failing to stop the fire with the rug, he tried to smother the flames by throwing his arms around her-- severely burning his face, arms, and hands. Fanny Longfellow died from her

injuries by the following morning. Too ill from his burns and grief, Henry did not attend her funeral.

That first Christmas after Fanny's death, Henry wrote, "How inexpressibly sad are all holidays." And then one year after the incident, he wrote, "I can make no record of these days. Better leave them wrapped in silence. Perhaps someday God will give me peace."

Almost a year after that Longfellow received word that his oldest son Charles, a lieutenant in the Army of the Potomac, had been severely wounded. A bullet had passed under his shoulder blades into his spine, leaving him permanently crippled. Though usually full of thoughts, whether cheery or glum, the Christmas of 1863 found only silence in Longfellow's journal. That is until at last, one full year later, his pen again fell upon the yellowing parchment.

It is said that Longfellow began the poem on Christmas Eve 1864. While alone that evening, haunted by the tragedies of his wife and son which were still fresh in his mind, the Civil War clamored on throughout the countryside.

Late that night Longfellow heard the midnight bells, and with his heart overflowing with grief he sat down and penned the lines:

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repent
Of peace on earth, good will to men!

Having broken the silence and happy to know he could still write in spite of his grief, he continued:

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men!

Till, ringing, singing, on its way,
The world revolves from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good will to men!

The night passed on, and his grief gave way to anger and bitterness, which he reflected in the next three stanzas. The roar of the cannons and the sting of their cruelty pressed so vivid to his mind that it seemed the darkness spread over the land had prevailed, Haunted by this reality he wrote on:

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born

Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
'There is no peace on earth', I said;
'For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!'

Longfellow did not sleep that night but sat numb and overcame with his loss. But then at dawn the bells from the church steeples began to ring again. Brightly now, for this was Christmas morning, their low and clanging announcements broke through the gloom and despair of the night. Moved by the new day and such faithful ringing, Longfellow found indeed that the hope and the peace he so longingly sought after had overcome, despite all that war and the cold world could rage against him. The bells rang loudly with their revelation of God's steadfastness -- and His triumph with good over all the wrongs that could be committed-. Inspired by this vivid experience -- this revelation in the dark -- Longfellow once again set his pen to the page that from the last night remained upon his desk; lying yet with unfinished scribbled words of rhyme. And like the victory of Christ over death brings forth new life, he finished his poem brought thus far to despair, with a culmination of the new-found hope and peace in the final stanza:

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep;
'God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men!'

We sang the song with new appreciation of its author and of the profound meaning of the poetry penned by him.

Sheryl Phipps read a short story titled, "Mary's Dream". It reminded us vividly of the way we so often give presents to each other and forget that it is Jesus' birthday we are celebrating.

A cappella, and with deep reverence, Rob Rolfe sang the apology each of us owes to Jesus, "Sweet Little Jesus Boy. We didn't know who you wuz!" He then asked us to rise as he pronounced the benediction on another spirit filled and moving worship service of the Mount Ayr Restoration congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Music Service Continues Celebration of Christ's Birth

As is customary on the fifth Sunday of any month, the Mount Ayr Restoration Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ held its music service December 29.

With Priest Gordon Winkler in charge, the musical offerings continued the celebration of the birth of our Savior with the theme of joy - our joy in knowing that Jesus Christ came to save us from our sins, Brother Winkler explained as he called us to worship with the scripture, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid: for the Lord, JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore, with joy shall ye draw water out

of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall he say, Praise the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things; this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee." (2 Nephi 9:133-137).

The congregation, accompanied by Erin Cornish at the piano, sang, "Joyful, Joyful we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love." Gordon offered the invocation. Jazmyn on the violin and Aquila on his guitar gave the first music offering - a softly worshipful, "Silent Night, Holy Night!" Jerry Slayton followed with a German Christmas carol, O du froliche, o du selige Weihnachtszeit, sung in German. Since it is a carol unfamiliar to most Americans, Brother Slayton first provided a translation of the main ideas of the song the title of which is, "O you joyous, O you blessed Christmas Nights". (In Germany two nights are celebrated instead of just one.) Ronald Smith accompanied him on the guitar.

The Alan Smith family, including Peter and Erin Cornish, sang, "What Can I Give Jesus, Our Savior, Our all?" Diane Anderson told a story of the joy that resulted from the sacrificial giving of a beautiful Christmas gift of love. The congregation sang, "Joy to the World! The Lord has come!"

Ben Anderson played a piano solo. Gabel Galusha played a violin solo. Danny Kinnaman sang "Jesus Lover of My Soul, let me on thy love rely." Danny was accompanied by Ron Smith on his guitar.

Ron and Di Smith sang the Christmas classic from Martin Bell's, The Way of The Wolf, "Secret of the Stars."

Doctrine and Covenants 28:2a-c was read prior to the ushers accepting the monetary offerings: "Verily I say unto you, that ye are chosen out of the world to declare my gospel with the sound of rejoicing, as with the voice of a trumpet; lift up your hearts and be glad, for I am in your midst, and am your advocate with the Father; and it is his good will to give your the kingdom: . . ."

Matthew Anderson played a piano solo. Erin Cornish and Cara Smith sang, "In a Tiny Manger He lay, a tiny baby asleep on the hay." Rob Rolfe, with his own guitar accompaniment sang, "I'm Gonna Walk a Little Closer To My Lord."

Linda Winkler called the children around her chair and read the book, You Are Special, a story about wooden characters who were covered by stars or dots until their maker taught them how to keep the appellations from sticking to them.

Michael Jordison, accompanying himself on his guitar, sang, "You are the Light of the World, O Lord. How can there be any darkness in me?" Sue Beck and her sister, Kathleen Myers sang, "Gentle Mary laid her child in a manger, ... King of all the earth!"

In dedication, the congregation sang, "Draw, Thou, My soul, O Christ, closer to Thine. Breathe into every wish, thy will divine. Raised my low self above, won by thy deathless love, ever, O Christ, through mine, let thy life shine." Gerry Bolingbroke pronounced the benediction on a service that left us feeling very close to our Savior.

From the Pastor's Desk

Continued from front page

from the shepherd, and are scattered, and are driven, and are devoured by the beasts of the forest."

Are we like a wild flock? Or, do we hear and obey the voice of the Good Shepherd? Alma says, "If you will not hearken (hear and obey) to the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which you are called, you are not the sheep of the good shepherd. And if you are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are you? (See verse 65 for the answer) . . . Therefore, if a man brings forth good works, he hearkens (hears and obeys) to the voice of the good shepherd and follows him." (Alma 3:64-64, 68).

What if we are the shepherd? Could all of these questions be asked of us? Don't each of us have a responsibility to be a "shepherd?" If we are disciples of Jesus, we are called to be shepherds. If our "critters" are starving or neglected, don't we care? Doesn't it bother us, if we neglect our discipleship, that we may be responsible for the suffering? Jesus said to Peter, after he was called: after he walked with Jesus for about three years; after he witnessed the crucifixion; after he witnessed the resurrection; after all this, he left his calling and went fishing. Jesus appeared and said, "Do you love me? -- then feed my sheep."

We should do likewise.

News & Notes

New Year welcomed

The new year was ushered in with a New Year's Eve party at the home of Gordon and Linda Winkler in Mount Ayr. A number of people from the congregation and friends gathered to share good food, games and visiting. The first Wednesday of the new year brought a prayer service at the home of Alan and Valle Smith in Mount Ayr as well.

Prayer and fasting

The new year is also being welcomed with a period of fasting and prayer. The fasting will begin Friday night, Jan. 3, at 6 p.m. and continue until the potluck dinner on Sunday. Several prayer services will be held beginning Friday night at the home of Norman and Kathy Nelson in Lamoni. Prayers are being asked that the message of God's love will go to those who don't yet know him. We have had many good experiences as we have made this a matter of fasting and prayer, including the decision that sent Mildred Smith and Diane Anderson to Kenya last year. Join us in fasting and prayer even if you can't come to the services.

**CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
Mount Ayr Restoration Branch
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