

Church of Jesus Christ Mount Ayr Restoration Branch Newsletter February 2008

Highway 2 East, Mount Ayr, IA 50854 • 641-464-3435 • angel-message.org



INDEX

Testimonies and Sermon Notes

| Speaker | Page |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Steven Smith | 1 |
| Rob Rolfe | 2 |
| Brad Carr | 4 |
| Sherm Phipps | 8 |
| News and Notes | 1 and 10 |
| Calendar/Themes | 11 |

NEWS AND NOTES

Winter Trip to Mexico

Three members of MARB just returned from a 10-day walk-about throughout the Yucatan Peninsula area of Mexico.

Traveling with PSI Tours and Graceland College, Barbara Jordison, Brandy Anderson, and Ron Smith each report having had great fun including enjoying excellent accommodations and intriguing classes on Meso-American history and culture, and sharing much laughter and overall good fellowship with their 13 travel companions.

Highlights included visits to nine ruins, two museums, and play-time in the coastal city of Cancun (location of the 2nd largest coral reef in the world). Besides much climbing of trails and pyramids, boating down the Usumacinta River, enjoying a quick-soaking rain typical of the rain forest, having breakfast prepared for them in the forested out-of-doors (jungle), and the various sights and sounds of the jungle, they had many opportunities to improve their Spanish language skills as well. Barbra reports developing new skills in price negotiation, haggling from an asking price of one item for 1,000 pesos to receiving three items for 550 pesos.

To learn more about their adventures and the ancient cities of those who walked there before them, visit our website at www.angel-message.org/Mayan.html for links to photos and tidbits about Mayan ruins such as Dzibanche, Kohunlich, Becan, Chicanna, Uxmal, Palenque, Yaxilan, Chichen Itza, and Bonampak.



Steven Smith Communion Service January 6

You'll notice on your bulletins that Kent Klisby was assigned this period of time. I was excited when Kent gave me the opportunity to take his place. I hope you will be excited about the things I will share as well.

Today I would like to talk about faith. There is a lot that has been written about faith. There are a number of stories that have been told of faith. There are two great treatises on faith in the Scriptures. One is in the Bible in the second chapter of James, and one is in the 16th chapter of Alma in the Book of Mormon. I will read some of this to you, but this being a political season of sound bites, I will give you some sound bites from each of these scriptures. As you go back to study about faith, James the second chapter and Alma the 16th chapter are two that you can read to learn more about faith.

14 What profit is it, my brethren, for a man to say he hath faith, and hath not works? Can faith save him? **15** Yea, a man may say, I will show thee I have faith without works; but I say, show me thy faith without works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. . . **19** Thou believest there is one God; (Now in this case he is using belief and faith as one thing.) thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble; thou hast made thyself like unto them, not being justified. (Just believing that God is just brings us to the devil level.) **25** For, as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.

Then from Alma 16, **143** And now as I said concerning faith: Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith, ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true. **151** But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith; yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words. **152** Now we will compare the word unto a seed. And so he does compare the word to a seed and he talks about how faith is what makes you want to plant it. As it swells within you, you start to know that it is good.

162 O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea; because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible; therefore ye must know that it is good. **163** And now behold, after ye have tasted this light, is your knowledge perfect? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed, that ye might try the experiment, to know if the seed was good. **164** And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say, let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up and bring forth fruit unto us.

Again, you will probably want to put those back into context and not just use sound bites from the second chapter of James and the 16th chapter of Alma.

Faith in the scriptures as I read it is on a spectrum as Alma called it, a particle of faith. A desire to believe is the smallest particle. If I take light and hold a prism up to it, we'll see that the light gets broken up and there are different things that make up the light. In that spectrum you will see red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, going from the infrared to the ultraviolet. In the same way, when I look at faith and hold the prism up to it, we see that it goes from the smallest wavelength, the desire to believe, through what Alma called hope. In Hebrews 11:1 it talks about faith being a hope.

There was the time that the Apostles were trying to heal a

man, and when they were unable to they asked Christ if he would. Christ healed the man and the Apostles asked why they couldn't do that. Christ told them it was because of their unbelief. If they had had that belief, that full belief, a little greater than hope, then they would have been able to heal the man. That came only with much fasting and prayer. We see that hope, belief and faith become synonyms for one thing. Hope represents the middle ground of faith, with desire being the smallest particle, and a great belief being the greatest particle, and all of those being faith.

How do we gain this faith? There is a clue in the story of Christ healing the man when He said it came through much fasting and prayer. That is one way to do it. The other way is rather simple. It says to become as a child to actually do what you need to do. The faith, when Alma was talking about it, was that desire to believe, that hope, or that belief that when you put the seed in the ground, it would grow. He said the seed was an analogy to the Word. If we take the word of God, and if we really believe it, then we start to use that word of God. If we haven't been doing what the word of God has asked us to do, then now, because we have faith, because we want to know if it is true, we have been called to experiment on that word, to do what the Lord has asked us to do and then watch the fruit of that grow within us. That is called repentance.

And so we see that James in a lot of his works talks about faith being inseparable from works. He is talking about the works of repentance, those works that we do that are different.

This understanding was common in the early Christian church. It wasn't until the time of Martin Luther that this understanding began to change. Martin Luther was vexed with a severe case of diarrhea. He spent the better part of a month in the outhouse studying. As he studied, he was concerned because the Catholic Church at that time had confused what works were. They said if you wanted to go to heaven, you had to give the church about the equivalent of what a person makes in a lifetime. In return you would receive a piece of paper giving you admittance to heaven. Earning enough money to pay the church for the piece of paper granting admittance into heaven became the major work of people. Martin Luther said, "No, that's not the way it works. The poor people can't get in this way." As he was having his severe bouts of diarrhea, he came to the conclusion that it was by grace and not works that you were saved. So we have with us the result of that period of time where works had been misinterpreted as not works of repentance, but works of getting gain for the church. As a result, many people today will say it is just grace that saves you and you just need the faith, you don't need the works with it.

James says if you just believe then you are up to the devil level, because devils are that way. They even tremble because they know. But you have to do more than believe. You have to actually create a plan and do something about it. James said that faith without works was like the body without the spirit. It's dead. One way to kill your faith, to say you have faith but not really have it, is to not do anything about it. Just to say, "I got it, it's mine, it's on the wall, I can show it to everybody," and not do anything else about it, the faith is dead at that point. It doesn't work.

In Alma 16: 160, it says there is another way to can get rid of your faith. And now behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant. So if you'll take your faith and do the works of repentance, make those changes in your life in the way you think, talk and act and plant that in your life like a seed, then you're going to know the result of that and in that thing you know longer have to have faith. Faith is a dynamic thing. If you don't use it, you lose it. If you use it, you lose it. It's in that time that you use it that faith grows great and makes it so you can build on that faith and get more and more and more.

God has asked us to have faith and repent. I'd like to now take James 2 and Alma 16 and what we've deduced from them and put it with Doctrine and Covenants 17:22d which is the Communion prayer. In this communion prayer we've made a promise to God to change a few things. This varies for everybody, but there are three things God has asked us to do. In D & C 17:22d it says we should take His name upon us. We know that in baptism we take His name. If a person takes communion and they haven't taken His name, they've already broken the promise. It's important, and that's part of the unworthiness we were talking about earlier. It's important

that we take His name upon us and we do that through baptism.

If I were to adopt a young individual into my family and he were to take my name upon him, there would be several requirements that would go along with that. It would go far beyond the adoption ceremony and the signing of the papers. Taking the Smith name would require him to adhere to certain ways of thinking and doing things that would make him a Smith, just as being adopted into any other family. There would be traditions and habits that he would take up that would make him a member of that other family. He would then feel a part of the family. Christ has asked us to take His name upon us, to be adopted, to be like family, to be brothers and sisters. There are rules He has made, and sometimes he's called it even like a king making rules, and those who keep the rules are in the kingdom. We're in this family where we are called by the name of Christ, where we are Christians.

It's more than the initial adoption ceremony or baptism that is necessary if we are to keep our covenant that we have made today to take His name upon us. The second thing He has asked is that we remember him always. In D & C 17:22, we see the act of taking communion is an act of remembrance. It's something that brings us together once a month to remember His body and blood that was shed for us. That is an act of remembrance. But it says to remember Him always, not just once a month when we get together to have communion. Going along with taking His name upon us, He has asked us to go a little bit deeper to remember Him at those times when we are angry with our brothers and sisters, frustrated, depressed, happy, sitting down to eat, going to sleep. He has asked us to remember Him. By remembering Him, keeping His commandments, which is the third part of that, we are part of His family. He has made the rules, and He said we must always keep His commandments. We must take this word and plant it in our souls as a seed. We must repent and turn this word into knowledge. He said if we will do these things, we will have His spirit to be with us always. That is the knowledge that we will have that this works.

He has made the rules. He has offered the covenant. Today we have accepted the covenant. We must go beyond just our faith in believing that what was said is true to actually repenting and trying once more to show that we have taken His name upon us, to show that we remember Him at all times in our lives during the day and the night; not what action star Jean Claude Van Dame would do, but what would Jesus do. We must show that we are willing to find out what His commandments are and keep them in order to make that change so that we have His spirit to be with us.

Robert A. Rolfe

January 13, 2008

Rob read Daniel 3:16-21.

I'm going to talk about faith today. When you think about it, what is faith anyway? It is a word that in Hebrew is translated as both a noun and a verb. Those are not the same things. Verbs are action words, and nouns are typically the names of things. How can something be both a noun and a verb? I'm going to talk about that.

Faith is basically made up of three things. I have a box here this morning that I'm going to be using. It has faith on the front of it, and trust here, assent here, and knowledge on the back side of it. There are some things in this box and I'll dump it those things out on the table.

I'd like you to consider the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. There are different ways to view that story. One of the ways is from Nebuchadnezzar's point of view. (Rob blew up a balloon.) Nebuchadnezzar knew these guys. They were supposedly his "Buds". They were members of his court and were part of the group known as "wise men". After they said they were not going to bow down to his statue, he said, "heat that fire seven times hotter than it was before." I brought the fire with me (a candle lighter). What is going to happen to the men when he throws them into the fiery furnace? They are going to die because the

fire is seven times hotter. How long do you think this balloon will last if I put flame up against it? (Rob placed the flame against the balloon and it instantly exploded) That is what Nebuchadnezzar expected to happen to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they were thrown into the fiery furnace. Now obviously they had some faith. Faith is one of those things that you really do not know if whether you have it, until you are confronted with a situation where you need it. To have faith you must have some knowledge. Paul will tell you faith and knowledge are not the same thing. But, I am not talking about perfect knowledge. I am saying that you have to know something about what is going to occur. You cannot believe in something if you do not know anything about it.

Let me give you an example. I have this box. Many of you are experienced with the force we call gravity. How far can I push this box over the edge of the table before it falls on the floor? Half way? Anything further than that and it will fall on the floor? How do we know that? It is because of our experience with things that have happened in the past. For all I know, if I push this over the edge, will it float off into the air. Not so! We expect the box to fall because of our experience in the past. Let me push this box about half way. What happens if I push it further? Well, I pushed it and it is still hanging there over the edge. That is what faith does for you. Fail can make things happen that your experience tells you are not likely to happen.

Apostle Paul tells you in Hebrews, Faith is evidence of things not seen. There is something in your experience that tells you whether something is right or not right. The evidence that you have seen tells you that whether something is supposed to happen. You must believe in "something" for you to have faith.

A fellow was asked, "What do you believe?" "Well, I believe what the church believes." Well, what does the church believe?" "The church believes what I believe." "Well, what do you and the church believe?" "We both believe the same thing." What does that person believe? Nothing. Except that the church was right, but in what, he could not tell.

I am a believer---in what? I believe that if you do not have any knowledge, you do not have any faith. The scriptures say in the gospel of John, "Search the scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life. And they are they which testify of Christ." Apostle Paul goes on to say in Hebrews that, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Is God somebody you would like to please? It makes sense, that if He is the creator of the universe, we probably would like to please Him. Or at least, if we have any sense, we ought to please him. So, we better figure out how to get faith. If you want to find knowledge, search the scriptures.

You may have knowledge, but still may not have faith. Why not? Because you do not believe in it. Do you believe this box is still sitting here even though it is more than two thirds of the way off the edge of the table? David Hume, who was a British philosopher, said that we have a "predicament" in view of the world. If we let go of something and it falls, we do not know that the next time we let it fall, whether it might stay in the air on that try. Just because it has stayed in the air the first five thousand times, does not mean that the next time it is going to fall. In real life, however, and not standing around the cracker barrel with our friends, we believe that the next time, and the next time and the next time, the item is going to fall because we have faith that it will fall, based on our knowledge. If you do not believe that something will ever happen, then you do not have faith. You have got to believe that it is going to occur based upon some experience.

If the scriptures say such and such is true, you may have knowledge; but then do you agree with what it says? I have had people say that if the Bible says something, they believe it. Well, what if you do not understand it? Do you still believe it? What if it is a really hard saying? "If your eye offends you, pluck it out." Do you believe that? "If your hand offends you, cut it off." Do you believe that? I do not see many people walking around with one eye or one hand gone. Apparently you do not believe that the scripture means to literally pluck out our eye or cut off our hands, or we don't understand. In some cases we definitely choose whether we will believe or not believe.

Delbert Smith told about a lady who, when he told her a particular scripture was in her Bible, she said, "No it is not." So

he took her Bible and showed her where it was. So she took her Bible, read the passage and then ripped the page out. Throwing it over her shoulder she said, "Well, it's not any more." Just having knowledge does not give you faith unless you believe it.

One time a lady at church was talking about how she was going to get even with some people. I told her that the scriptures say we are to love our enemies. She said, "I know what it says. I'm not doing it." You have got to believe in it for faith to occur. For you to have faith you have got to trust that something may actually happen, even if you believe it usually doesn't happen. You can have knowledge, and you can believe in it, but you may not trust like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that God is going to save you. That is really where faith comes in. The chief part of faith lies in the "trusting". That is why I have trust on the end of the box, because taking hold of that knowledge and trusting it, is what causes us to have faith. If you trust the gospel to be your salvation then you have actually taken hold of Christ and put him in your life.

Let me put it this way: it will not save you to know that Christ is a Savior. It will not save you unless you trust Him to be your Savior. You can believe that the atonement is sufficient to save you, but not until it becomes a part of your life will you be saved.

We have talked about casting ourselves on the promises of God. You find those promises in the scriptures. Luke 8: 42 says, "And behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue; and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought Him that He would come into his house." What was he looking for? If you remember the story, his daughter was sick unto death. He wanted Jesus to come and heal her, because he had heard that Jesus could do that. The story goes on to say that on his way he met someone from his household who said, "Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master." If you want to read the rest of the story, read Luke 8.

I remember an account of Ron and Doug ministry in Kenya when they answered questions for about twelve hours. Along about the end of the night some parents brought a child before them. The interpreter said, "This child is dead." The child was not dead, but it had not eaten or drunk for three or four days. It had a high fever. Ron and Doug had been talking about administration for the sick as it says in the book of James, so the parents brought this child and asked them to pray for it. Ron said under his breath, "Well, this is the test. Thank you Lord for the opportunity." This is where faith becomes evident. You can believe all those things and you can say, "That is it. That is the way it should be." But until you trust God the way Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did, and put that into your life, you do not have faith. If you remember their testimony, it was while they were praying for this child that Doug, being a physician, said he could feel the fever leave the child instantly. When they were done, the child sat up and began to wave her leg. Doug told them to take the child home and feed her. As a doctor, Doug knew that's what needed to be done. It is interesting to me that Jesus said the same things to the parents when He brought the child back from the dead.

I like a God who says, "Get this person something to eat." Every time after Jesus appeared (after He rose from the dead) He was eating. When He appeared in the upper room, He was eating. When He was on the beach with Peter, He had fish already cooking. Now what kind of a God is that that not only invites you over to eat but cooks the food too? Remember all the parables about the great supper, the weddings, etc., to which we are invited.

What should be the focus of our life? All the focus should be in pleasing God. If we please Him, He will adopt us as His children. Would you like to be a child of God? Would you like to have God for a parent? Now there is someone who could give you good gifts. If you are adopted by Him, then He will pour His blessings upon you. He will make you His heirs. Being an heir is something I understand, because in the law when people are heirs, the property of their parents descends to them. If you do not please God, it causes sorrow and suffering. If you will, there is a worm in your apple of joy. In the end you may receive eternal suffering.

As Mildred taught her sons and daughter, "Wickedness never was happiness." So if you are pleasing God, you have to have faith. How can you do that? It is not by doing as you want. You can try as hard as you want, and have all the fame and beauty and money, but without faith, if you do not please God, you still do not have anything.

I might point out to you that both Cain and Able presented offerings to God. But Abel's offering was accepted and Cain's was not. On their face, their offerings were equal in value. Both brought their best. The difference was, Cain brought his without faith. The Lord had respect for Abel's offering, but for Cain's, there was no respect. That is the way it is going to be until the end of time. If we come to God with our offering with faith, He will respect our offering. If we come without, He will not. There has never been an offering that was not seasoned with faith that was going to be accepted by God.

Faith is not magic. When Moses threw his rod down and it turned into a snake, the Egyptian magicians did the same thing. Was that magic? It was for them. Magic is nothing more than not knowing the secret of how something happens. So I am going to let you in on a secret why the box sits there on the edge and didn't fall. You cannot see it from where you are sitting, but if I lift the box and show it to you, do you see what is in the box? I duck-taped a brick in there. The box will always hang there because the brick has enough weight to keep it from falling off the table.

In Moses' case you could tell that his offering was in faith because, if you remember, the matter of the snakes was shown to him by God before he went to Egypt. Remember how God told him to pick up the snake? He said to pick up the snake by the tail. How many of you would pick up a snake by the tail? Is that the way you pick them up? This was a poisonous serpent that he was picking up. The difference between a magic trick and real faith occurred when Pharaoh's magicians threw their rods on the floor and they also turned into snakes. When that happened, Moses' snake eats the other snakes. Then Moses, through the power of God, turned the snake back into a rod again.

This box trick is not faith. Some of you probably did not know that there was a brick or something in there. It is a trick. The real essence of faith is trusting God to save you, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did, even though you do not know whether God will do so.

In the news recently, you heard about a family that was burned to death in a house fire. It was a real tragedy. Let us say that you are a child and you are in the upstairs of the house and you are looking out the window. The house is on fire, the stairs are on fire, and you cannot get out. How are you going to escape? You can jump. There is a problem with jumping from an upstairs window. You may break something. You may even die in the process. Let us say that someone strong comes and they stand under the window and they say, "Jump, and I will catch you." You know they are strong and can catch you. You know they are down there, you know they are strong, you know they have said they will catch you. The essence of faith is jumping out the window. Until you jump, you really have not demonstrated that you have faith.

We go back to what the scriptures say. Do you know that Christ died for your sins? We can say, "Yes, I know that." Do you understand that He is able to save you, if you believe that? Have you put your trust in Him as your Savior? Have you made Him King over your life? That is where the test is. That is where the essence of faith is. You have to trust him enough to do what he said, repent and be baptized and become His disciple or his death will not save you. "He that believeth not is dammed.

How can I know if I have faith? The brother of Jesus said you could tell if you had works. If you did not have works, then your faith was dead. But if you focus on your works, then you are still going to die. Why? Because you have not focused on the One who can save you and that is Jesus Christ. You have to trust Him to save you and make Him the King and Lord of your life.

Let us go back to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Let us just say that this is you getting ready to be thrown into the fiery furnace. (Rob blew up another balloon.) Let us say you now being tossed into a fiery furnace. You are empty. (Faith without works is dead.) What is going to happen when you get tossed into the fiery furnace? I am going to do this again so you can remember how long it takes. (Rob lit the lighter and the balloon exploded.) That is how long it takes if you do not have faith.

I brought you a person who does have faith. This particular balloon is filled with water. Would anyone like to stand under it as I light it? (Gable volunteered.) This water represents faith. If you have faith you can stand being in the fiery furnace, just

like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The last time I held the flame next to the balloon for about a half second. This time I will hold it there for five seconds and see if faith makes a difference.

After five seconds it still has not broken. There are reasons for that, but the lesson is that if you have faith, the flames will not destroy you just like the flames did not destroy Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The illustration is pretty clear. Faith will save you, even from the flames. How can God keep people from being burned? If you look closely, you can see carbon on the outside because it was starting to oxidize in the process, but it did not blow up.

With Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego the Bible said, "Because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counselors," Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? "They answered and said unto the king, "True, O king." He answered and said, "Lo, I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came forth out of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counselors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was there a hair of the head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them." Now for those of you who understand science, how could you not have even the smell of fire on you if you had been in that furnace? If you have ever had your hair burned off, you know how quickly that can occur. Not a hair was gone.

I remember watching Rod Adams when he caught on fire. I was sitting on a tractor and it blew up in a ball of flame and I was rolling off of it in the fastest I had moved in many years. When I got up, Rod was standing there calmly patting himself, knocking the flames off of him with his hands until he put all the flames out. Then he said, "Let's do this again," and went back to work. I was a little less brave than that. When he said, "fire" it up again and I was supposed to try to start it, I nervously was ready to bail off the tractor again because I thought there might be more flames coming out of it.

The essence of faith is to trust in God and trust that He will save us. If I have faith, how can I be sure I will keep it? I can tell you this, if you start to develop your faith, you can be sure the adversary is going to try to destroy it. That is the way he operates. How does he work? Primarily with lies. He is whispering those lies into your ears. Lies that create doubt, lies that create mistrust of your brothers and sisters, lies that the scriptures cannot be true, my professor says so. I will just point out to you again this bag of water. You can see it. You can see that if you do have faith, even if the flames of the adversary come at you that you will be able to withstand it and come through it okay. Without faith it is impossible to please God. To have faith you need to have knowledge, belief or assent, and trust. May you all develop greater faith in your life is my prayer.

Brad Carr

January 20

Never Be Weary of Well Doing

Before Brad Carr read the scripture, he shared the following. The Lord Jesus called His people together. We have two accounts. He instructed the people in the old world, if you will, and the people in the new world. We know of those two accounts, and I am sure He instructed many other people. He assembled them on the side of a hill and He taught them. He had a short time, a real short time to spend with them, and He attempted to teach them things of an

eternal nature that would change forever their lives. I marvel at the things that He taught us in such a short amount of scripture. For my boys this should be really familiar. Remember, He instructed us that it was really important that we build our lives on a firm foundation and that we make sure that the things that we do would be built upon things of an eternal and true nature. I would like to read to you from the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 64. This was instruction given through the prophet Joseph Smith in 1831 during the Kirtland period. It is directed to the elders but the Lord wants us to study His scriptures and so it applies to all of us as He challenges us and invites us all to be instruments in His hands. “. . . wherefore, as ye are agents, and ye are on the Lord’s errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord, is the Lord’s business, and he hath set you to provide for his Saints in these last days, that they may obtain an inheritance in the land of Zion, and, behold, I, the Lord, declare unto you, and my words are sure and shall not fail, that they shall obtain it; but all things must come to pass in their time; wherefore (and this is the part that I want you to really listen to) be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great. Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days; . . . Behold, I, the Lord, have made my church in these last days, like unto a judge sitting on a hill, or in a high place, to judge the nations; for it shall come to pass, that the inhabitants of Zion shall judge all things pertaining to Zion; and liars, and hypocrites shall be proved by them, and they who are not apostles and prophets shall be known. And even the bishop, who is a judge, and his counselors, if they are not faithful in their stewardships, shall be condemned, and others shall be planted in their stead; for, behold, I say unto you that Zion shall flourish, and the glory of the Lord shall be upon her, and she shall be an ensign unto the people, and there shall come unto her out of every nation under heaven. And the day shall come, when the nations of the earth shall tremble because of her, and shall fear because of her terrible ones. The Lord hath spoken it. Amen.” I pray that the Lord will bless this scripture and drill it into your hearts that we might know that we truly are called to be instruments in His hands this day. Before Brad preached, Ron and Di Smith shared a song about the heritage that we leave behind. Brothers and sisters, that’s why we are here. We want to serve God, we want to teach our families, we want to challenge and inspire and support our neighbors but we want to leave a heritage. We want to do something that is solid and true and pure and leave behind a legacy for those that are looking because there was a time when all of us probably were looking as well for the truth of life and some of us have found it pretty easy.

Let’s compare Eric Odida in Kenya and Brad Carr in Allendale, MO. What a miracle it is that Brother Eric found the gospel message and responded to it. I just think of the tireless efforts that brought that message to him. How hard was it for me to accept the gospel? I lived less than 100 yards from the church. I was the fifth or sixth generation Reorganized Latter Day Saint. My parents told me I had to go to church and they dressed me up and marched me half a block to the church. I think tirelessly about how fortunate I am that I have had the opportunity to attend church. People say, ‘Well you weren’t a convert to the church; you were born into the church.’ Yes, I was born into the church, and I thank you, Almighty God, that I was.

Each of us has our own challenge and our own journey, and we must come to a point in our lives where we accept the truth of the Lord Jesus or deny it. He either becomes real or just continues to be an obscure figure in our lives. I think that has been the testimony of each and every one of us. As I woke up this morning, I set the alarm way too early, it was really, really cold outside, and I was in this really warm bed that just felt so great. The first thought that came to me was of the testimony of Esther France. Many of you knew Esther and Dave France. When we would meet with them at their house on Wednesday night at prayer service, she would always greet us at the door. I would ask her how she was doing, and she would always say she was blessed and doing wonderfully. I thought Esther must be about 260 or 270 years old at the time. I don’t mean that in a negative fashion, she just was amazing. She wasn’t any bigger

around than my little finger, and I was always afraid to shake her hand when she would extend it because I was afraid of crushing her hand. She would meet us at the door and tell us that every morning when they woke up, she and David would give thanks to the Lord for another day. I thought of that testimony this morning when I woke up. My heart was beating, I was breathing and I would have an opportunity to go and bear witness of the Lord Jesus. I truly am the most fortunate person upon the face of the earth.

You have a character in your own congregation that I love running into. Every time I see him he asks me how I am doing. He has taught me to say instead of, “I am doing great,” “I am blessed,” and I am blessed, George. We are blessed, brothers and sisters. We have challenges, struggles, discouragements, disappointments and sadness in our lives, but when we add up the things the Lord has done for us, the countless gifts and blessings that He has given us, we can truly say we are the most blessed people on the face of the earth. We have a tremendous opportunity and a tremendous responsibility.

Ron asked me what I was going to speak about, and I said, “I don’t know really.” There’s been something that’s been on my mind and on my heart for a long time. I am going to share that with you here in just a few minutes. He said not to worry about the time. I am going to get you out of here by noon, or 3, or something like that. I will try to be good so maybe you will invite me back again.

God still speaks to us today

In the way of a testimony, one time I had an opportunity to preach at Cameron, MO, and I thought that I was really going to do a lot of preparation to get ready. I went to the Lord way ahead of time and asked Him what He wanted me to say. I worked and worked on my sermon. Those of you who are priesthood can relate to that. I worked on my sermon, and I was loaded for bear. I had it down, and I just had some tremendous points that I wanted to make. I checked in about 11:00 pm the night before with the Lord and asked for His blessing. I had an experience that I would have a difficult time relating to you in words, but I experienced complete confusion. As I looked over my brief notes and outline, there was just a spirit of confusion, and all of these things that I had been working on for a couple of weeks just weren’t right. I tried hard to convince the Lord that He was wrong and that He should reconsider after all the work I had done to get ready. I had made the grievous error of dictating to the Lord what He should say that morning. After a long period of prayer and asking His forgiveness, I went in and told Him that I was going to trust Him as I had done every other time. Of course, you know what His response was. He never, never ever leaves us alone or leaves us without His spirit to be with us when we sincerely call upon Him.

I knew walking into that congregation that morning that I was suppose to read Section 38 in the Doctrine and Covenants. In the back of my mind I was still a little perplexed as to why the Lord would change everything at the last minute and have me go a different direction. However, as we opened the service that morning, the presiding elder stood up, we had not talked together before the service, and read the opening to Section 38 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The spirit flooded my soul and once again I had another witness that the Lord is alive in our lives and that truly this church, His church, that we have the good pleasure being part of, is built upon the spirit of revelation. Almighty God, in His infinite grace and mercy, still speaks to us today and still directs our thoughts. That is important for you to know and that’s important for me to remember. When we walk out of these doors and walk into whatever realm we interact with on a daily basis, we have to remember that we have the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the spirit of truth, and revelation that will direct us exactly where to go, exactly what to do, exactly what to say, and who to search out. He is waiting for us and as He tells us in Section 64, He wants us to not be weary of doing His work, and He talks about these small things that are very important to the Lord. I am not intelligent enough to put the pieces together, but I marvel as I look back this past week, this past year, my lifetime, whatever it would be. I marvel at the way things have come together. He has continued to direct and guide each and every one of us in our path, what we call this period of probation.

The Lord works through us even if we are unworthy

I will tell you something about me that probably only one person in this room, my wife, knows about. When I was called to the priesthood, I was very, very excited and willing to do that. I didn't have a clue what that would entail but I wanted to jump onboard and help out in any way that I could. Immediately I felt the burden of being a servant of the Lord. I was a young guy and I am sure the Lord was very pleased that I was very willing to do that, but I came to the stark realization that I was really, really ignorant and not worthy. I kept struggling with the worthiness issue and as the years progressed, it became increasingly difficult to preach and expound the word. I really struggled with it.

I remember the moment that the scales tipped. I had a preaching assignment, and I really sensed the burden of being an instrument and the responsibility. I never entered into those responsibilities lightly. I took it very, very seriously. I have always tried to do that. I just would always come up with the realization that I wasn't worthy to do this and I wasn't capable of doing it. It came to the point where I was a very unpleasant person to be around probably about a week before it was time to preach a sermon. I would bark at the family and bark at the wife and would sequester myself.

On one particular occasion I was getting nowhere and pleading with the Lord to give me some direction, inspiration and guidance. I had struggled so much with this and had probably snapped at Sharon earlier when I heard her playing a hymn on the piano downstairs. You know it made all the difference in the world. "...Be not weary of well-doing for you are laying the foundation of a great work and out of small things proceedeth that which is great." She decided that she would minister to me. I can bear witness to you that from that point on I switched my understanding of the responsibility of bearing witness of the Lord from, "I have to preach a sermon..." to "...I have the privilege of speaking", and it is a privilege. It is one of the great joys of my life. It is one of the things that I love the most now. It was such a burden, and now there is nothing that I enjoy more. It was not something that I did, but it was something that the Lord changed in my mind and understanding. It is a lesson for every one of us as we look at our opportunities that we have in our lives. We could make so much more of our lives if we would be bold and simply step up and say, 'I am not capable, Lord, of doing this but all things are possible through you.'

We need to make our experiences available to other

The last time I spoke here I don't remember what I shared with you, so forgive me if I bear a testimony or two that will be the same. Something that has been with me this week came from a story that I heard Henry Schaefer talk about. He actually recorded it in his book. I want to share with you my personal side of it. When I was about Alex or Jack's age (Brad's two youngest sons), dad came home one day and said, "Guess what?" He had called the family together for a family meeting. He said, "We have bought a farm." The first thing in my mind was that this was great because we could run and up down the hills and play in the creek and climb the trees. From Dad's angle, it was "let's get some cattle and you can check cattle and we can row crop and you can pick up hay in the summer." We had two different views of what this farm was going to be like. It was a great experience for us. It was one of the most wonderful things that our family ever did.

When we went out to see it the first time, some local people told us the history of the farm. One of the things they shared with us was that this was kind of a famous place. Many years ago an old hermit had lived there and he was very, very wealthy but you would never know it. He lived in a log cabin on the side of the hill that you could see from the road. It was back about a quarter of a mile away from the road. He lived there all of his life. Everyone knew that he had gold, but when he died without any family, no one knew where that gold went. It just disappeared with him and so the story goes that after he died many people came and searched and searched, but they never found the gold. We even went out with our metal detectors when we were young boys thinking that we were going to get rich overnight. I think we found a horseshoe and that was about the extent of it. I have no idea if that was a true story but it was a great story that everyone knew around the area.

The reason I mention this is because of one of the testimonies of

Henry Schaefer about our gifts and talents and what we do with our lives. He wrote a book called "I Will Be With You Always," and I am sure many of you have read it. In the book it says, "The person who gathers experiences in life and does not make them available to his fellow man who hunger for them, but hoards them so they die with him, is like the miser who buries gold in a secret place where no one will ever find it and use it." What Brother Henry was sharing with us is exactly the same thing. It is absolutely essential that you and I sense the urgency of our lives and sense the urgency of the hour and get really serious about testifying of the Lord Jesus and what He has done for us.

I always like to think about why we gather together today, why do we come together regularly? I loved Rob's class this morning. There are lots of different ways to respond to the Lord. We can fear Him and come because one day we are going to stand before Him, and we don't want to be on the bad side of Him. Or, we can come because we love the Lord and what He has done for us, and we respond out of our love for our Creator and our Heavenly Father. I hope that above all we love the Lord and respond because of that. We need to see the hand of God in everything around us

I never want us to ever forget how fortunate we are as a people. I am reading a book by Brother Arthur Oakman right now. I have to read it and then reread it several times before I understand all that he is sharing. Brother Oakman was certainly on a different spiritual plane than I am on. He shares this quote in his book, Resurrection and Eternal Life, "Since the whole creation testifies of God and is designed to lead men to Him, had man learned under His tutelage to look for and expect the action of deity in the ordinary instead of striving for His manifestations alone in the extraordinary, the whole course of history would have been vastly different and the lives of men immeasurably enriched." Now, I didn't catch that the first time, but I am sure many of you did. Let me simplify that. Brother Oakman is simply saying that we tend to call on God and we recognize Him and we recognize the miracles when we call upon Him for miraculous things. So, we have a disease and we call Him to intervene and fix and correct our life. We have countless testimonies of miracles that have occurred within our families and our lives and our congregations, but Brother Oakman is saying let's take it to a different plane.

What if you and I, the Lord's church, would learn to see the hand of God in everything around us. In the sixth chapter of Genesis, God tells us that His handprint is in everything. If we started looking at life like that, we would recognize that we can count our blessings, but we are often oblivious to just how rich and how blessed we truly are. We need to realize the opportunities and the things that surround us that we are blinded to. You understand the point? It is a huge difference in the way that we perceive our lives. It's a completely different shift in how we interact with Almighty God when we realize that He is much, much closer to us than we ever realized and not just when we call upon Him for a special blessing.

I want to share with you a couple of testimonies that relate to never ever being discouraged but always being willing and able to step up to do the Lord's will and never tire of doing good works. We need to realize the blessings and gifts God has given us

I was thinking about what Brother Oakman said. I was trying to become a more thankful person. I have really tried to push myself the last couple of years, trying to take the blinders off from my eyes and life and see things in the proper perspective. One of the things that has helped me was that our oldest son graduated and was going to go to South Dakota to college. Really quickly I tried to cram in a lot of eternal life lessons that maybe I hadn't shared with him. I wrote Tim a letter and tried to share with him a lot of things and boil it down to the essentials so that he would say that it was very profound and life changing. If I had been living a better example, he would have probably gotten those lessons much earlier on. I was trying to share with him that one of the greatest ways of dealing with challenges and adversities in our life was to continue to look at how we are blessed and the many different gifts that Almighty God has given us.

The Lord taught me one of these things about three years ago. I may have shared this the last time I was here. Forgive me if I did, but it's been on my heart and since Cheryl and Sherman (Phipps)

are here I want to share it very briefly. Alex, our middle son, was seriously hurt in a football game, which many of you know. When that happened it took a lot of the fun out of athletics because we were so proud of him. We knew that he was not going to be a professional football player but it was fun to see him being a good sport and having fun and grinning and laughing as he came off the field. That all came shattering down when something went bad.

The story went that he intercepted a pass and ran it back for a touch down, went across the goal line and was tackled at the same time. We were all celebrating when his mother said that he was hurt. I disagreed but she made me go down and sure enough he couldn't get up because something was wrong with his shoulder. With some help from the coaches they got him on his feet. Alex, who never feels any pain, went and sat on the bench. I knew that the situation was not good. In a short time in front of coaches, officials, and his teammates, he asked me to administer to him. Now I am not bragging on my kids. Please forgive me if it seems that way, but I thought that was the way our lives were supposed to be. He immediately recognized the source of His strength in his life.

I reached in my pocket, and I didn't have my oil. What kind of an elder would ever do that? A bad one. What kind of a dad would ever do that? A bad one. I had to walk down to my son and tell him that I was sorry, but I had forgotten to bring it this time. As I stood there helplessly, a friend of mine from the Community of Christ immediately sensed the dilemma I was in and walked over and real quietly handed me his vial. He said he didn't know if this was OK with me or not, but to take it if I needed it. I'll be honest. I love the man but I don't agree with him. However, as we took Alex to the van and got ready to take him to the hospital, I opened the vial and said, "Lord, I don't know what you think about this, but would you please bless and consecrate this oil." I did the best I could myself and administered to him really quickly, and we took him to the hospital. The doctor said, "You guys are idiots. Don't play football. This is crazy." He told us that Alex had broken growth plates in his shoulder and that it was a serious injury. He told us that we needed to let the swelling go down and then take him to a specialist so that the shoulder could be operated on and set back in place. He said if everything was OK that hopefully Alex would be fine but that he shouldn't play football.

We need to be prepared to serve Him at any time

As we were headed home we asked Alex if there was anything that we could do for him, and he said that he was hungry. So, we took him to Osceola and Sharon ran into McDonalds to get him a sandwich before we headed for home. I was sitting there completely distraught because of my response to my Heavenly Father and my son. I was not prepared, and I was not doing the things that I needed to do. I was praying to the Lord, and as I just finished my prayer, a gentleman walked up to the side of my van and said, "Hello," and it was Sherm. Now I am not saying this to embarrass Sherm or Cheryl and certainly not to elevate them, but to illustrate the point that we are to never be weary of doing good works. Little things, little moments in our lives can make all the difference in the world. He told me that he had just seen Sharon and that they didn't come to McDonalds very often. He said that Sharon had told him what happened to Alex and would we want him to be administered to. Now, Sherm, how many times have you and I met in McDonalds before in our lives? To the best of my knowledge we have never had a McDonald's meal before together, and I don't think that is probably Cheryl's favorite place either. Look what happened, brothers and sisters, because of our Father in Heaven, he put servants in place and my son was administered to that night.

I want to continue the testimony. I may have shared it with you last time, I don't remember. Three years later I was with Alex in a specialist's office for a check up to see how he was doing. We were waiting for the doctor who was absolutely marvelous, just a wonderful man. He set it, pinned it and everything was great. We thanked God that we had found this good man. I was looking at a chart on the side of the wall and reading about how broken bones heal. As I read, the Spirit of God came over me and flooded my soul. Suddenly I understood something on a different level than I have ever understood. I admired the doctor and appreciated and respected his efforts but the doctor didn't heal my son. The doctor

aligned his shoulder, pushed it back into place and stuck some pins in it. It was a marvelous procedure, but he didn't have anything to do with healing my son; Almighty God did. I read the process whereby cells regenerate and how they combine, and I don't even begin to understand it. However, as I stood there looking at that, the Lord flooded my understanding with, "I healed your son."

Brothers and sisters, that is the message today. We cannot heal ourselves physically or spiritually. We cannot continue on, as we talked about, being perfect. We all want to live in the celestial realm. We all want to live with God for eternity. The best we can do is to align our lives by knowing what He has for us and then trying to do it. Then He does the healing. We do that by serving one another and serving God and responding to every opportunity that we have. Every opportunity that we have, we do it willingly with gratitude in our hearts because we get another day to serve one another and to serve Almighty God.

We can serve others by doing small things

I want to share with you just a couple of real quick testimonies. I spoke in Independence awhile back. This is the most simplistic testimony that I have ever shared with anybody. To me it is one of the most profound experiences about who we are as instruments and servants in the Lord's hands; all of us, all of us are instruments and servants in His hands. Do not count on your priesthood to do it all alone. That is so wrong. I spoke at a large congregation in Independence. As we were back behind getting ready to come out, the presiding elder was sharing with me who was going to help in the service and the hymns that were going to be sung. Afterwards, He was telling me where to go so I didn't wander off and fall in the baptismal fount. As we were doing this, a gentleman walked up to me and said, "Excuse me, I have a glass of water for you. It will be on your right hand side about thigh high if you need it." I thanked him and he walked off. We went out front and sat down and began to sing a hymn. I always ask the Lord before I preach what he wants me to know today; "...what do you want me to understand?" Once again I was flooded with what had just happened. How many of you are capable of providing a glass of water or doing something that simple for another person? We all are, aren't we? If I had asked George to get me a glass of water or mentioned that I had a low tire, he wouldn't hesitate doing that simple task. This gentleman was a deacon and an elderly man. As I sat there getting ready to speak, I looked underneath the podium and there was a glass of water about this tall. It was filled about three-fourths full and was on my right hand side just above my knee, easily reachable from right here. It had a note card over the top of it. The Lord flooded me with what had just happened.

This elderly man, this deacon, was performing his responsibilities with every fiber of his being. He was doing it as best he possibly could. He came and instructed me that he had a glass of cold, clean water. He told me where it would be located so that I wouldn't fumble for it and not be able to find it. He had filled it three-fourths full, not half full, because maybe I was really thirsty, not completely full because maybe I would slop that all over myself, and it would distract from the service. He placed a note card over the top of it. Can you imagine why? Do any of you have any ideas? To keep the bugs out... Jack, do you agree? That's exactly right. This brother put a note card over the glass because he didn't want a fly or a spider to crawl into the water. Now I don't know him and he doesn't know me, but he did those things for me. But, more importantly, he did those things for the Master because he wanted that service to be as dignified and free of distractions as possible that we might focus everything we had on the Lord Jesus. I had a clean glass of water in case I needed it because a servant did everything possible without complaining. He did it with joy in his heart for His Lord. That's the simplest testimony I could ever conjure up. To me it is one of the most profound, because we can use that in every aspect of our lives. I am going to challenge you that you are going to walk out of these doors, and the Lord will provide an opportunity for you to minister immediately, even this afternoon.

I am going to share this other quick testimony. Forgive me, but I will be brief. I was at reunion several years ago. My boys were real small. Their Mom told them after a few days that it was time

to take a shower, and they wandered down to the shower room. I thought that I had better go down and see if they had really made it or not. I wandered down and I found three Carr boys lined up, buck naked, almost at attention, and Brother Doc Nelson was checking them for ticks. I don't know if you remember that or not, Norman. We laugh about it and I know the Lord laughs with us but that brother was checking his little brothers to make sure they were safe. He was looking their hair over and checking them all out, making sure they were all right because they had been out in the woods.

There are countless opportunities, there are countless responsibilities and there are countless ways we can serve Almighty God. We are to never ever be weary of doing good for by the small things proceedeth that which is great, and Almighty God tells us that you, through these things, are laying the foundation of a great work. I told Ron I would read this. I will tell you how great this work is and I will tell you what you can expect. This is how great it is, if you will give your life in service... If you will do it and respond when you get that call at 1:00 am in the morning to go and administer to someone, and if you do it with gratitude that you have another opportunity to serve... If you take the time to make that phone call to the widow or stop in to see them, and if we will do these things, our reward will be so marvelous that it will be like this... If we do these things our reward in celestial glory will be incredible. Well, let me read it to you because I don't have the words. "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

It is our turn now.

I could stand and preach to you for two or three more weeks and never begin to explain to you the mercies, the joys, the tremendous things that await us for a life that is well served, a life completely dedicated to Him. Ron and Di's song was absolutely perfect. I was grumbling a few years ago because I was discouraged that we didn't have more people that responded. Why couldn't more people take time out of their schedule to serve the Lord? It seemed like more and more and more responsibilities were being placed upon our back. I was grumbling and once again Sharon taught me one of the great lessons of marriage, of priesthood, of being a member of His church. She said simply to me that it was our turn now. There have been those that have gone before us to lay the foundation. They have provided the testimonies and the encouragement and the life well lived that has brought us and encouraged us to where we are, and now it is our turn. Brothers and sisters that is my hope and prayer for each and every one of us, that as members of His church, we will live this life and it will be pleasing and acceptable to Him when we stand before Him at the day of judgment.

I am grateful to you for the opportunity to share with you for a few minutes. We are not very far apart. I hope maybe one of our goals this coming year is to get our congregations together to worship more often. I appreciate you very much. Each and every one of you has had an impact upon my life and upon the lives of my family. I wish you God's greatest blessings as you continue to be instruments in His hands and serve Him. Serve Him so that if we are privileged to be old like Esther France, we can shake the hand of a young man or a young lady on Wednesday night and testify to them how grateful we are to be a part of His work.

Sherman Phipps

January 27, 2008

I want to read several scriptures to you this morning. I am always a little nervous when I do this because I know we have real scripture scholars in the congregations and you will recognize that I take these a little out of context and some of these were given to specific persons and specific groups, but I hope they will be appropriate for all of us this morning. "And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people and bring save it be one soul unto me;

how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father. Behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful, and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily, I say men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause and do many things of their own freewill and bring to pass much righteousness for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves; and wherefore as ye are agents and ye are on the Lord's errand and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord, is the Lord's business. Thou shalt not idle away thy time and neither shall thy bury thy talent that it be not known; for there are many gifts and to every man every person is given a gift by the spirit of God." And this last is not from the scriptures, but I think it could be in there. "And to every person, it is given to influence another."

This will probably be like usual, I will just kind of ramble and hopefully the spirit will give you something. The thing I have been really impressed with when I tried to prepare for this morning is that every one of us has something that God has given to us so that we can share with all his people. And that doesn't mean just us sitting here in this room, or those others in a different congregation. I think that there are some of us who think that we don't have anything to give. I have certainly had that experience. But, when you read the scriptures you find that it says the Lord calls upon the weak things of the world, the unlearned and the despised. I don't know if any of you have felt like that, now it does qualify that some, it says the unlearned and the despised who have received the fullness of the gospel. And it talks about when he calls upon the poor, meaning the poor in heart. He calls upon these people, the weak and the simple are included, that the fullness of my gospel might be proclaimed; that His gospel might be taken to the end of the world.

In fact it says in the Book of Mormon, that He gives us weaknesses. Maybe I ought to read this, "I give unto men weakness, that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak thing become strong unto them."

The point I am trying to make is, how many of us work hard to be weak or simple? Or how many of us think it is a good thing to be poor and unlearned, or even despised? Those are qualities that the Lord says that He will use to accomplish His work.

It's not just a good thing to be unlearned and despised. It's those that have received the fullness of the gospel in spite of those weaknesses. And it's not necessarily a good thing just to be poor. But it says that if you are pure in heart, that's not a roadblock, not a stumbling block. He desires to use every one of us. None of us have an excuse for not serving. He intends to use every one of us. Every person here today has at least one gift. Some of you as I look around, I know, have more than one and I try not to be jealous. The Lord created every one of us and He held every one of us in his hand before the foundation of the earth. He knew us. And He sent us forth in his own time for a specific purpose, and that purpose that we are here for can only be accomplished by His power.

I wanted to talk to you today about the idea that each one of you has a unique purpose here on this earth. It would be a shame if any one of us were to fall asleep. Or it would be a shame if we were too busy doing other things and didn't recognize what he it was that He has called us to do.

You know the story of Abish and how she was available at the unique time. When you read the scripture, you get the impression that she's been there, she has been serving for years and she knew something about Christ. But apparently she didn't feel free to share that until just the right moment she was able to step forward for Christ.

I don't know if anyone has been in the Polk County Court house. It's quite a building. It has marble and brass rails, and lots of neat things. Every time I go in there, I wonder what it took to build this building; and of course it is nothing compared to some other places in the world. But, you know what impresses me most? There's a guy there, he's a big guy, he's the janitor. He is friendly, but he is not very outgoing. He is always in there working. He's either sweeping the floor or polishing the brass on the handrails. That's what I really remember about the Polk County Court house.

I always think, I wonder if there is any way that I could be privileged to be like that man in the Kingdom of God. To

figure out what it is that I am supposed to be doing, and do it, while everybody else is rushing around being important.

I hope everybody here this morning can somehow understand how important you are to God's work. And how important it is for you to be ready and prepared when He requires service of you. It may not be something big that everyone's going to notice. And at least in my case I hope it is not, because the second that happened, I would have pride all over me and it wouldn't be a good thing. And the kind of service I am talking about is the kind of thing that comes only from good, only from God.

I woke up in the night a while back. I was impressed with how important it is that we be ready when God calls us, even though it may be some small act, some simple thing.

I was at a youth camp one time. I was at an early morning service. A spirit that I want nothing to do with came over me and I was paralyzed. I could still hear what was going on around me, but I couldn't see anything. I couldn't move. And I knew that the other people that were there were singing, there were some prayers, then they were leaving, but I couldn't move. I was engulfed in darkness. A man who was there as a counselor for that camp reached out and put his arm on my shoulder and said, "Are you all right?" The second he did that, the darkness was dispelled and I could move again. And I have thought sometimes, what if that was the only thing I was sent into the world to do? It would be worth coming. It would be worth doing. But, what if he hadn't reached out and touched me? I don't know what would have happened. But he did.

I wonder how many times every day there are people around us who are waiting somehow to be touched by God's hand and his spirit. And he would use us if we would allow him to do that.

What a marvelous thing it is that Cheryl is here with this group; for it certainly isn't the way that she was raised. But the Lord, as He has done for all of you, reached out and touched her life and shared his love and his gospel with her. And you have heard her talk about what it was that converted her to the gospel. I don't remember her ever mentioning preaching. Maybe I should sit down. I don't remember her ever mentioning a lot of the things that we talk about. It wasn't the fancy building, etc. It was the love of the people. That's what really hooked her.

I have thought about other things. I have thought about how my own earthly father's life has impacted and influenced mine. And from there to others, and I thought about what if when he was inducted into the military he had decided, well I'm going to be sent over seas. I don't know if I'm going to come home and I'm going to party. There are some things that I want to do. What if he had done that, instead of saying, I don't know if I'm going to come home or not, and I want to know if there really is a God and spent his time praying. It sure would have changed where my life would have gone. And the thing is, every one of you has that opportunity too.

I don't know when its going to present itself to you. I thought about, in addition to my dad, who has been an important significant person in my life? I ask you to think about that. Your parents, grandparents, pastors, brothers, sisters--- who has been there to touch your life at just the right moment by the power of the spirit so that you took that path that leads to God?

That's why there is so many of us, because we need that to happen to us often. Even though that person touches your life and it redirects you, and brings you to Christ, we need it to happen to us over and over. He has been able to use this person or that person.

So today as we sit here and go from here, I'd like you to think about what difference does your response to the Lord make to other people, even if it's just one other person. What difference does it make to the soul of at least one other person if we repent? Truly repent or don't repent. If I don't repent, getting rid of pride or whatever it is that gets a grip on me from time to time, whom will that make a difference to? Who will be affected, besides myself, because I do or don't repent? Who will be affected, besides myself, if I do or don't obey the commands of God? Who will be affected if I fail to pray and to fast as we have been told to do? I don't know about you, but for myself, prayer and fasting comes when I think I need help.

My concern though, are there times that we should be praying and fasting for the welfare and the souls of our brothers and sisters? Yes there is, but do we do it until we

need help? Who will be affected today or tomorrow, this week, by whether or not I have God's charity in my heart?

We have our agency, we can choose to do these things; to repent, to be obedient, to love our fellow man, to pray and fast for our fellow man. We can do these things if we choose; or we could not do them. For myself, I am concerned about what I am doing or what I am not doing.

Moroni 10:20 says, "For if there be one among you that doeth good, he shall work by the power and gifts of God." I am not looking at you; I am looking at myself and thinking, 'Do I work by the power and gifts of God?' If not, then I am not doing good. What does that mean to those around me? What does that mean to the souls of mankind with whom I have contact every day?

How often does the Spirit prompt us to do things that need to be done for the sake of the souls around us? But we're just not motivated. Again, maybe I am just talking about myself.

I went back and read the story of Moses. There were some things in there that struck me. Remember when the Lord told Moses to go to his people in Egypt. Moses says, "Who will I say sent me?" God told him to say, "The Great I Am sent you." The thing that struck me was, that he was going to the Lord's chosen people and they weren't going to know who sent him. And I have wondered in my own life if the Lord sent someone to me, would I even recognize the one who was sent and who sent him?

The Jewish people had all this organization, the traditions, and that sort of thing. God told Moses to gather the elders together and tell them why I sent you. In spite of that, they still didn't really know God. If we are sitting around today wondering what's going to happen to the church and allowing that to interfere with our personal response to God and his calling to us, then we haven't really understand what it is that he has asked us to do. We have an opportunity everyday to serve him. That's the thing that we have to account for.

There is another thing that struck me about the story of Moses. The Lord had just spoken to him, and he said in effect, 'Lord how am I going to do this, I wasn't eloquent before and I am not eloquent now?' This kind of hit home with me. I thought how often has the Lord asked me to do some thing and said, 'I am not eloquent and I wasn't before and am not now' and failed to realize that it didn't matter if I was not eloquent for He would make sure that it was done right.

There is another thing that struck me. Remember it says that the Israelites had been in Egypt and the Lord sent these plagues on them. The last plague was those who didn't mark their doorway with the blood of the lamb, their first-born and the first born of their flocks would be killed. When that happened the Egyptians would say to the Israelites, "Go, get out." I don't know why this struck me, but may be it will you too if this is what the spirit wanted you to hear this morning, He told the Israelites to also eat the lamb, the part that wasn't eaten by morning, should be burned. I always had it in my mind that every family was to kill and eat their lamb, but as I reread it, it says kill the lamb and however many people it will take care of those people are to gather together. We are not just out here individually; we are supposed to be sharing to be prepared. After they killed their lambs, they needed to be ready to go quickly. This was after 430 years of captivity. They had to be ready to go quickly, the next day. I wondered how that would be true of us. I am sixty-four and some days I don't feel like I have accomplished anything, but that doesn't mean that it is okay for me to go home and sit down. We better be ready to go when the Lord calls us. Again it might simply mean we need to be ready to help those people the Lord tells us to help.

He needs us to be living the kind of lives that would cause us to be in tune with the spirit so he can use us when He wants to in whatever situation it is.

Once the Israelites left, they kept mumbling and grumbling about, maybe they should have stayed there. How much more clever Satan has been with us even than with the Israelites. God was leading them out of captivity. They had been carrying all of these burdens. They didn't have to be slaves anymore. How hard is it going to be for us to get up and go? What are we going to give up--- our plasma TV? We have a lot of work to do for us to be ready and respond and not be distracted by all the things that are around us.

Brothers and Sisters, it's really important that we repent, that we learn humility, that we learn somehow to be one people, that

we learn how to appreciate each other and each other's gifts and how to support one another; and to be sensitive to those around us and when they are struggling and when they need someone to help them. And I don't mean just within the body of Christ, but those around us. There are souls around us who hunger for God's love. And how will they find that if we continue to ignore God's direction and council--if we continue not to be ready and not to be open to the leading of the Spirit? When I read the scriptures I cannot help but think that I am not doing a very good job.

There's a lot more that the Lord wants to do, He's going to do. I would like to see each one of you be a part of that. When Zion is established, if it comes during our lifetime, I don't see anyone that I don't want to be there. We have to choose whether we are going to be part of his work or not. I want to encourage you today to recognize and acknowledge that each one of you has something unique and special to offer. Don't let it go unoffered.

NEWS AND NOTES

Budget Meeting

A short business meeting was held at the close of the 11:00 service on Sunday, January 27, to consider the congregation's budget. A budget of a little over \$42,000 was approved for 2008. The branch also approved sending \$1,000 to help the saints in Kenya and \$2,300 to provide scholarships for students to attend Center Place Restoration School while their parents are in the United States helping to translate the Inspired Version of the Bible into Spanish.

Branch members were also given an opportunity to review the resolutions from the October national conference of the Joint Conference of Restoration Branches. No action was taken to reject any of the resolutions. In response to one of the resolutions, Brother Rob Rolfe was set apart later that day in Independence, along with Vern Darling and Doug Smith, to visit Wallace B. Smith to ask for any inspired guidance he might have for the restoration movement.

Upcoming Events

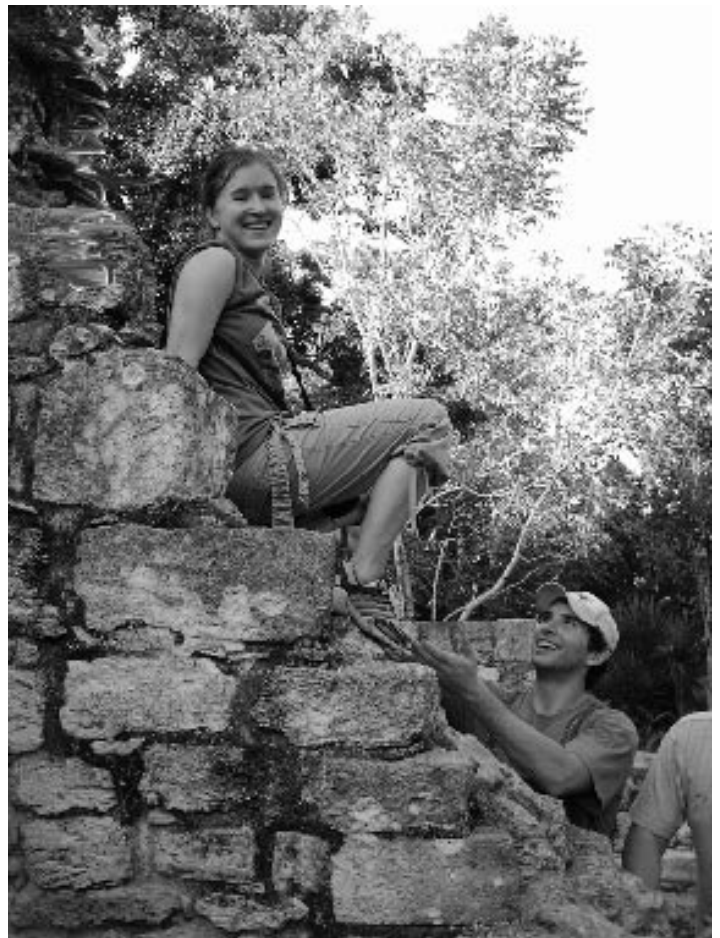
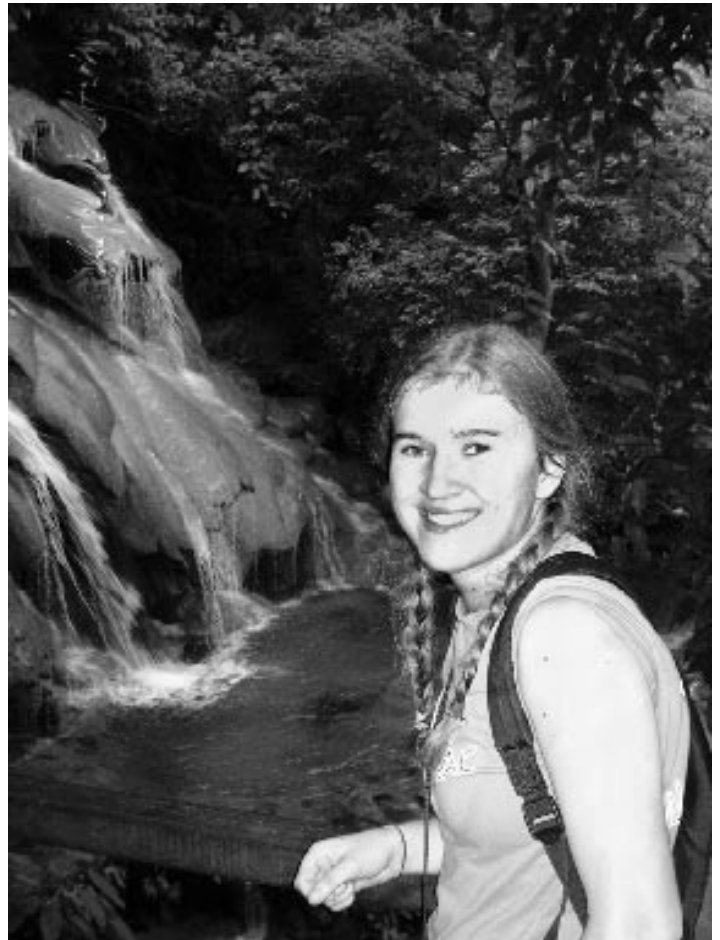
Fellowship Dinner for Adults

Friday, February 15, at 6:30 P.M., we will have a Fellowship Dinner for adults at the home of Norman and Cathy Nelson. The meal and entertainment will be provided. All you have to do is come for a relaxed evening of fun and fellowship. Invite your friends and come along.

Regional Meeting

Our congregation is invited to attend an informational meeting on Saturday, February 23, at Northeast Restoration Branch in Des Moines. The meeting will begin at 9:00 A.M. with a meal provided at noon. It will end sometime in the afternoon. Brothers Doug Smith and Bob Giertz will be present to share information about the upcoming April conference. Everyone is encouraged to attend to discuss important issues, and share hopes, desires and concerns for the future of the church.

Brandi Anderson, above right and Brandi and Thoric Smith enjoy the beauty of Palenque, one of the sites visited during the trip to Central America.



CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

607 E. Madison
Mount Ayr, IA 50854