

Church of Jesus Christ

Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

NEWSLETTER

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*Here we go
a'caroling*

News & Notes

Branch retreat set

The branch will have a retreat the last weekend of January at FarWesta camp grounds near Stewartville, MO, with the theme "Drawing Closer."

We will gather as soon as we can on Friday night, Jan. 28. Everyone is invited to bring a snack for the evening.

Saturday will include several classes and other activities. Rich Rupe and Ron Smith will be teaching the classes.

We will have a worship service Sunday morning and camp will break by

noon.

We hope as many people as possible will come to the retreat. There is no registration fee.

Holiday activities

Special Christmas activities are planned for the season of Christ's birth in the Mount Ayr Branch.

The branch has the opportunity to help make Christmas brighter for families in the area, and helped with food

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JESUS LOVES ME

**High Priest
Sherman Phipps
Lamoni, Iowa
December 6, 2015**

Brother Michael Jordison shared: Good morning, brothers and sisters. I greet you in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. It's good to see each one of you here, to be able to participate in the Lord's Supper together.

As a Call to Worship Brother Jordison read from Romans 16:25-27. *Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to the gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith; To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.*

Third Nephi 8:28-41 was read in preparation for the taking of the Lord's supper. *And it came to pass that Jesus commanded his disciples that they should bring forth some bread and wine unto him. And while they were gone for bread and wine, he commanded the multitude that they should sit themselves down upon the earth. And when the disciples had come with bread and wine, he took of the bread, and break and blessed it; and he gave unto the disciples, and commanded that they should eat. And when they had eaten, and were filled, he commanded that they should give unto the multitude. And when the multitude had eaten and were filled, he said unto the disciples, Behold, there shall one be ordained among you, and to him will I give power that he shall break bread, and bless it, and give it unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name. And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken bread, and blessed it, and gave it unto you. And*

this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, which I have shewn unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father, that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me, ye shall have my Spirit to be with you. And it came to pass that when he had said these words, he commanded his disciples that they should take of the wine of the cup, and drink of it, and that they should also give unto the multitude, that they might drink of it. And it came to pass that they did so, and did drink of it, and were filled; and they gave unto the multitude, and they did drink, and they were filled. And when the disciples had done this, Jesus said unto them, Blessed are ye for this thing which ye have done, for this is fulfilling my commandments, and this doth witness unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you. And this shall ye always do unto those who repent and are baptized in my name; and ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you, that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me, ye shall have my Spirit to be with you.

I want to say good morning to you again. I am truly glad to see every one of you here this morning. It's a privilege for me to be up front with these men. We have three of the Andersons which I think is pretty neat. I was sitting up here thinking about that, thinking about my life and how I happened to be here this morning instead of somewhere else. God must love me very much to have brought me here with all of you instead of some of the places the world would have led me to. I don't mean to exclude the others up front with me. I am really grateful to be associated with all of you people.

Sitting here I wish there was some way for me, not for myself, but on behalf of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to just take and hold each one of you in His arms, not mine, but in His. I thought of how He has told us in the scriptures

that He stands before us with His arms wide open inviting us to come to Him and to let Him take upon Him all of our problems, all of our infirmities, all of our sins. He's asked us to come and let Him do that for us. We have the right to choose whether we will come or not.

We have come this morning, and most of us probably participated in the taking of these emblems. In doing that we have said 'Yes, we will come to you, Lord, and let you take all of our burdens and rejoice in your forgiveness.' That's really the only thing I wanted to say this morning. I somehow wanted to encourage you this morning to consider what you have done in partaking of these emblems and how you have said to God, to His Son Jesus and to your brothers and sisters, 'Yes, I will take upon me the name of Jesus Christ.' I hope that you will consider what that means.

As I thought about this morning I calculated, because of my age, how often I've probably come before the Lord in this service and said to Him 'Yes, I will take upon me your name.' Meaning that 'Yes, I will obey your commandments and I will be what you want me to be.' I've probably done that somewhere around 800 times. Some of you are younger than I am and one or two are older so that the number for each of you would be different. When I come here this morning and say, 'Yes, Jesus, I really do want to repent of my sins and my weaknesses and my failings. I want to turn those things over to you and become a new person today. I want to be cleansed, take upon me your name and promise you again that I will serve you and be your son, that I will obey your commandments.'

I wonder what He thinks. He must think, 'Do you know how many times you've been in this service and done that? Eight hundred times and what have you done with it.'

The good part of this is that He still stands every day before us with His arms wide open. He doesn't count, I don't think, and though it might be



a dozen times or 800 times or a 1,000 times if I come back to Him really and truly humble with a sincere desire and intent to serve Him, He'll take me back. He'll take each one of you back.

I hope you can go from here this morning understanding that and feeling Him calling you and saying, 'Please, let me take your burdens. Let me lift you up and make you whole and bring you back to your Heavenly Father whole.' Now I admit the scriptures say that He will not always work with us but I don't think that's a matter of how many times we partake of this communion and then stumble and then come back. As long as we come back with real true intent of heart, He will take us back.

I thought of a story, that might be a silly story, of a time when I had an old car. Cheryl and I were living in Des Moines and I needed to put a different motor in our car but I was going to school full-time and working and I wasn't sure when I would get that done or how. One night I decided that tonight was the night to put that engine in that car. I had to take one out of the car we were trying to drive and one out of another car and switch them. As soon as we were done eating I went out and started working. I don't know why I had it in my mind that I could get this done and get in to bed by midnight or so.

I don't know if any of you have ever done a project like that but if you have you know that I was fantasizing when I thought I could get it done that quickly. I just remember lying underneath the car and being at the point where I was trying to put things back together. After a while I realized that I had no idea how long I had been out there but that it must be really late. I remember thinking that Cheryl was probably mad at me because I never came back into the house. There might be a lesson in that for us to. It's up to us whether we go back to the Lord or not. We need to do that before He gets frustrated enough He won't let us back in.

After a while as I was in the process of putting the final things back together on the one I wanted to drive, I heard something that really got my attention.

We lived in town where I had never heard this before but apparently it happened every day. I just wasn't out there to hear it. I heard somebody's rooster crow. I thought, 'Oh no, I wonder what time it is. I've definitely run out of time.'

Well, given the day and age we live in and everything that's going on around us I want to suggest to you that maybe we should be listening because I think "the rooster's crowed." I think we're running out of time in terms of our ability to say to the Lord, 'Yes, I will take your name upon me. I will take the name of your Son upon me and I WILL live my life according to your words and your commandments.' He may need to move on and quit waiting on us to make good on our word.

It may sound to you like I'm saying two different things because on the one hand I'm saying He's always willing to take us back but on the other hand time is running out in terms of His plan for His creation. He cannot allow us, in this nation at least, to continue the way we're going without interceding. I heard some of this in our adult class this morning. I heard somebody talk about the scriptures that say He'll use the wicked to destroy the wicked and that's what is going on. To me it seems really really important this morning to understand that we will not always have the opportunity as we've had here this morning to come and partake of these emblems and say to the Lord, 'Thank you for another opportunity. Thank you for another chance to be renewed and to be made whole and to serve you.' At some point we exercise our last opportunity and make an eternal choice of life or death.

It kind of reminds me in a sense of another story or experience. I hope this has some meaning for you. This is another old car story but with a different car. When we were living in Des Moines the first time after we'd been married we came home a lot on the weekends to Creston where our families lived. One really cold winter day we were headed to Creston for the weekend after I had finished school and work for the day. It was starting to get dark since it was win-

tertime.

I think we had two children at the time. They were in the back seat and we were in this old car headed to Creston. We got probably 15 or 20 miles from Creston and it was dark by then. Suddenly the lights went really dim. We had some light but not much. I knew that either the alternator or generator was going bad and that we were strictly running off the battery. It wasn't replenishing itself so I turned the lights down to park lights and turned everything else in the car off including the fan on the heater to try and make it to Creston with what was left of the battery.

Maybe this doesn't apply to any of you here this morning but when I look at myself someday I feel like that's what I'm doing. I've become disconnected from the power that we all need to be connected to that gives us life and hope and joy and energy and the strength to keep moving and reaching out to those around us. I'm just kind of running on what's left in my battery and it's getting lower and lower. But when I come here this morning I think about what Christ



Sherman Phipps



has done for us. We talked about this and I know I've thought about it a lot of times. I still don't think I really have any appreciation for what it took for Him to give His life and to allow Himself to be crucified. This is always an amazing thought to me because here He is the Creator of everything. It says that God created all things through His Son Jesus. He is the Creator of everything and gives us every breath, everything that we have and yet He came and said that He would be the sacrifice for us.

So we made it to Creston. Getting to my parents on weekends like this was sort of like coming and being renewed even though there's no comparison really to being renewed spiritually. We really depended on getting back to Creston to my parents and our congregation there to be recharged and regenerated. Those people were very meaningful to us and we owe them a lot.

So that weekend regenerated us but the other part of that that I thought might be applicable this morning is that when I got regenerated or recharged that weekend I didn't just go back out and get in that car and start back home. I replaced the alternator first.

Sometimes I think I come here and I get kind of recharged but I don't really reconnect with the power source like I need to. I don't really stop and think about what I'm doing with my life. Where is it that I can be more obedient? Where is it that I can be diligent and align my life with Christ in a way that will allow me to reflect Christ to those around me?

Now I realize as I say this, and for some reason I've been really sensitive to this lately, that I am one person in a world that presently has about 7.3 billion people in it. I'm just one grain of sand. I think Jim said it in class this morning. You and I, all of us, are just like one little grain of sand but yet Christ loved each one of us. We say the words and they just come out as words but I don't want that today. I want somehow for the Spirit to carry to you how important and how significant every one of you is to your God and your Creator that He would send His Son as a sacrifice for you.

Anyhow I've been really sensitive to the fact that I'm just this one little grain of sand and I wonder what right I even have to be up here. Except if the Lord invited me to serve Him then I'm going to try to do that. We really need each other. I came in here this morning earlier and was looking around at all the different people that were here and thought how much you mean to me and how important your efforts are to God's work and how I should be supporting you more than I do.

I noticed a pattern recently as I was looking through some of the scriptures. You see it with the Brother of Jared and in several other places. You see where over and over when certain individuals that we have a record of would go to the Lord and pray to Him He would work with them. When He worked with them one of the things that invariably happened, which is clear in the stories, they begin to pray for their brothers and sisters. The welfare of their brothers and sisters becomes a very important thing to them when they see and feel what God feels for His creation. All of them then turn their attention to praying for their brothers and sisters.

If I don't do anything else here this morning I would like to try and make that kind of commitment to you. I desire to be more conscious of you every day and to uphold you in prayer to my Heavenly Father that you might not be lost. That this thing that we do here today might not be done unworthily but that it might be done worthily in that we truly go from here with an intent to serve Him and support our brothers and sisters in their efforts to serve.

Now I said we're a little grain of sand. I don't know about anybody else. We're coming up on Christmas and one of the Christmas traditions at the Phipps household has been to put together puzzles. If you've put puzzles together and if your experience has been anything like ours you get right down to the end of it and there's a piece missing. There's always that one piece or maybe two or three that are missing. It's frustrating so we search the house looking for that one piece so that we can finish the puzzle.

This morning even though we might only be little grains of sand we are a piece of the puzzle. The Lord is not willing for any of those pieces to be left out or missing. We, if we have partaken of the communion this morning, worthily with real true intent so that we can be one with Him and feel what He feels, should not be satisfied if one piece of the puzzle is missing. We should not be willing to go home and sit down and watch TV or whatever as long as we know that there are pieces of the puzzle that haven't been gathered in so that the puzzle can be completed, the picture that Christ saw when He looked upon us and said, 'Yes, I'm willing to give my life, to give my body and my blood for your people.'

I hope this morning that the Spirit will move upon you that you will feel even though a grain of sand how important your life and your soul is to Christ, that you'll understand what He has done for you and be willing to give your lives every day back to Him. I want to read a scripture in closing from Mosiah 3:21. Here's my hope for us today individually and as a body. These are the words of King Benjamin. *Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him, who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all.* This is my wish for you and my hope. We have the opportunity to do that this morning having been renewed and having renewed our covenant. I hope you'll take that very seriously.

Michael Jordison shared: *Behold I say unto you, that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal; and this because of your faith in him according to the promise; Wherefore, if a man have faith, he must needs have hope; for without faith there can not be any hope. And again, behold I say unto you, that he can not have faith and hope, save he shall be meek and lowly of heart; if so, his faith and hope are*



vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly of heart; And if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost, that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity; for if he have not charity, he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity. And charity suffereth long,

and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things; wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for

charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail; but charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth for ever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with them. (Moroni 7:47-52)



HAVING YOUR OWN PRAYER WAR ROOM

Priest Rodney Bastow
Mount Ayr, Iowa
December 13, 2015

My scripture this morning is taken from 1st Corinthians 13:1-13 (NIV). *If I speak in the tongues[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three re-*

main: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

I want to echo the sentiments about Sue's handiwork. When you walked in today you knew it was Christmas. I am thankful for this opportunity to speak to you today. I'm really thankful for the ideas that I have been given as I prepared. God is really good and I pray that His Spirit may continue to bless us during our time here together. May we praise His name and give Him all the honor and glory.

It's been a busy week. You'd think when you're old and retired like I am you wouldn't have anything to do but that doesn't seem to be the case. It seems like there is always something to do and somewhere to go. The nice thing about that is the busier you are the more 'thank you, Jesus' moments you have. Isn't that true? The more that you get into the more that He is there for you and does for you.

A couple weeks ago presidential candidate Mike Huckabee came to town. Mike Huckabee used to be the governor of Arkansas, ran for president eight years ago and is running for president again. He is a Republican but you might be able to guess that after I tell you a little bit about him. Now I'm not campaigning for him and I'm not trying to pressure anybody to vote one way or the other. We all got invited around Mount Ayr to go to a Meet and Greet Mike Huckabee. I thought that would

be neat.

Have you ever shaken hands with a president? I haven't either. Not that he'll be president but he could be. I've shaken his hand and talked to him and had my picture taken with him which I thought was really neat. He still has a radio talk show and I hear him every once in a while when I'm out in the tractor. I always liked what he had to say. He seemed to be a real down-to-earth guy and has a lot of common sense. If there's anything in this country we could use right now it's some common sense.

We decided to go to this Meet and Greet. We weren't supporting him. That was not the candidate of our choice but it turned out to be a really great experience for us. He talked and told us why he was the best candidate for the job. He told all of the things he has done. One thing I really liked was that he didn't bad mouth anybody. So much of what we see on TV or Facebook or the news is one candidate bashing another. Huckabee didn't do that.

Now you could kind of infer that he wasn't really strong on some of President Barak Obama's policies. You got that impression right away. You got the impression that he really didn't think that the people that had not been involved in government should get elected to the Office of President. Everything he had to say was right on in my opinion. By the time he was done he had gained our support.

I didn't expect this but during his



talk he used a lot of examples from the Bible to explain his point. Like for example, he used the parable of the Ten Talents and the Five Talents and the One Talent. I remember thinking wow that it was something that he would use scriptures out of the Bible.

Right now to get elected you don't want to take a stand. You don't want to come right out and say that you're a Christian, do you? You don't want to come right out and say that you're against homosexuality, but in fact, Mike Huckabee is really strongly opposed to it. I thought it was rather refreshing that he would use a lot of scriptural references in his talk to us that day. Of course he probably knew who he was talking to and probably knew what we wanted to hear. That's just part of being a good politician.

He was asked several questions. One of them was what his definition of marriage was. I don't know if that was a set up or whether that was canned but they asked him, 'What is your definition of marriage?' He said that marriage was the union between a man and a woman for the purpose of producing children to repopulate the earth. I thought that was a pretty good definition. That kind of fits with what I think too but he said that it's more than that.

Marriage is a test to prove that we can love someone so that we are able to love Jesus Christ. I thought wow! So many people say that they love Jesus but they don't love their spouse. I think that that's strange isn't it? Isn't it strange that you can't love someone that is here with you but you can love someone that's not here and who you haven't seen? I liked what he said about marriage. He said a lot of people go into marriage for the wrong reason. He said a lot of people go into marriage thinking what can this person do for me rather what can I do for that person.

He gave an example of a pastor whose wife was suffering from Alzheimer's. She was pretty bad off. She didn't know him and couldn't recognize anyone. She was just kind of in a vegetative state. Mr. Huckabee decided that he would go visit this couple who were in the hospital or a nursing home. He was

a little surprised when he got to their door.

He heard voices and there was a conversation going on but when he got in there he saw that it was just the man and his wife. The pastor was feeding her very carefully one little bite at a time. He'd give her a bite and wipe off her mouth and would talk to her about the weather. He would talk to her about their family. He would talk to her about what was going on in the world, just like he normally would do.

Mike said that he talked to him and asked him why he did that? The nurses would feed her. She didn't understand what the pastor was saying to her. She couldn't respond to him. He said that the pastor told him, 'I took a vow to love her in sickness and in health. This was a way that I could meet her needs.'

Marriage is the committed relationship in which the focus is on meeting the needs of the other partner. I saw another example of this in the recent trip we took out West. In our group we had a pair of newlyweds. He was 90 and she was 84 and they had just recently gotten married. She had ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease is what I call it. She'd lost the ability to speak. She could still talk to you by writing you a note but she could no longer speak. She could kind of get around. He would communicate with her and help her get around and take care of her. They both really seemed happy and they both seemed to really enjoy the trip. I've been married for 45 years on December 27th. I like to think that I'm doing better as a husband but I hope that I can do as good as what that man was doing.

This week I was sitting over on Deb's side of the bed to put on my socks. She had a framed reading or poem called The Art of Marriage by Wilferd Arlan Peterson. I suppose I have read it before but I guess I hadn't really read it.

Happiness in marriage is not something that just happens.

A good marriage must be created.

In the art of marriage the little things are the big things...

It is never being too old to hold hands.

It is remembering to say "I love you" at least once a day.

It is never going to sleep angry.

It is at no time taking the other for granted;

the courtship should not end with the honeymoon,

it should continue through all the years.

It is having a mutual sense of values and common objectives.

It is standing together facing the world.

It is forming a circle of love that gathers in the whole family.

It is doing things for each other, not in the attitude

of duty or sacrifice, but in the spirit of joy.

It is speaking words of appreciation and demonstrating gratitude in thoughtful ways.

It is not looking for perfection in each other.

It is cultivating flexibility, patience, understanding and a sense of humour.

It is having the capacity to forgive and forget.

It is giving each other an atmosphere in which each can grow.

It is finding room for the things of the spirit.

It is a common search for the good and the beautiful.

It is establishing a relationship in which the independence is equal, dependence is mutual and the obligation is reciprocal.

It is not only marrying the right partner, it is being the right partner.

It is discovering what marriage can be, at its best.

Earlier this fall I took Debbie to a movie. This shows you I am trying to be a better husband. That doesn't happen very often let me tell you but someone had suggested the movie "War Room" to us. Someone suggested this to us and I heard somebody went to it and didn't like it because they thought it was going to be a war movie. Now I don't know what you folks think but I think whoever wrote this movie had to be a Latter Day Saint because the things they talked about in there were kind of like what we



believe. "War Room," for those of you who haven't seen it, is a movie about a couple that is having trouble with their marriage. Tony the husband is a pharmaceutical salesman and is very successful. Elizabeth the wife is a realtor and they have a young daughter about 10 years old. Tony and Elizabeth don't seem to get along very well. In fact, they fight all the time.

I don't know what you thought but I thought it was because Tony was all about himself. What he was thinking about was what he could do for himself. He didn't really pay much attention to his wife or to his daughter. He caused them to feel hurt. He caused them to feel rejected. That's how it starts out.

Elizabeth goes to see a house to list it one day. This house is owned by an elderly woman, Miss Clara. Miss Clara has decided that she needs to move in with her son and is going to sell the house so Elizabeth comes to look it over. It's an older house and they go into one room and Miss Clara says that it's her third favorite room. They go to another room and she says this was her second favorite room. Elizabeth is thinking that there must be something really spectacular about the most favorite room because the other two were pretty nice.

Elizabeth leaves and comes back after a couple of weeks to talk to Miss Clara about what she thinks the house should sell for. Miss Clara tells her that is fine but that she wanted to talk to Elizabeth first. She asked Elizabeth if she went to church which I've never asked a realtor. Elizabeth told her that she did occasionally. Miss Clara asked her if that was because her preacher only spoke occasionally? She replied that she meant that they just attended occasionally.

Miss Clara then asked her about her prayer life. Did she pray? Elizabeth told her that she did sometimes. She was starting to get agitated at Miss Clara for grilling her on this. Then Miss Clara asked her what her prayer life was like. Was it hot or was it cold?

When the coffee was ready she handed it to Elizabeth and it was lukewarm. Elizabeth told her that her coffee

was only room temperature. Miss Clara replied that you either liked it hot or cold and that's the way that your prayer life should be too. It should either be hot or cold.

Now where did she get that? Where did it come from? In Revelations 3:15-16 it says, *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.* What are we? Are we hot or are we cold or are we lukewarm?

Think of the people that you hear about any more especially like the politicians. Are they hot or are they cold or are they lukewarm? We've gotten to a place in this country where we don't want to say anything that offends anybody. We have to accept things and we have to have a warm fuzzy Jesus. That's what we have to have. This time of year we can't say Merry Christmas. Why can't we? Christmas is all about the birth of Jesus. If He hadn't been born we wouldn't have Christmas. Christmas is actually celebrating the birth of Christ so you about have to say Merry Christmas don't you? There are other things we don't seem to want to take a stand on.

Miss Clara believed in the power of prayer. I noticed we have a poster out there that talks about being a Prayer Warrior. Well Miss Clara was a prayer warrior and she prayed for things. She said, 'Elizabeth, I want to show you my favorite room in the house.' She took her upstairs and opened this door to a closet. There was nothing there except for a chair and a Bible and some post-it notes on the wall. She said that this was her War Room and she liked spending time there. She posted notes on the wall of favorite scriptures. She posted notes of people and things she wanted to pray for. She posted notes of things that were going on that she thought God needed to change. She told Elizabeth that this room was where she laid out her battle plan. This room was where she developed her strategy to fight satan.

She had two favorite scriptures. One of them was from Psalms 145:17-19 (NIV) *The Lord is righteous in all his*

ways and faithful in all he does. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them. The other one was 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) *Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

She told Elizabeth that Elizabeth was having trouble with her marriage and asked her what was wrong. Elizabeth started talking about Tony and the things that she didn't like. Miss Clara told her to stop that she needed to take this to the Lord. She told her that she couldn't change Tony. We can't change another person only God has the power to do that. Only His Holy Spirit has the ability to change someone from being the way that they are.

She told Elizabeth that she needed to start a prayer list and get her own War Room and start praying for him and praying for the problems that she thought she had. The scriptures say that *when you pray you aren't to be like the hypocrites that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners*



Rodney Bastow



so that they can be seen by men. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you are praying do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do for they suppose they will be heard for their many words. (Matthew 6:5-7 NIV)

Now in our house we don't have any closets that are big enough for a war room. Probably where I feel closest to God is in my tractor. I could take post-it notes out to that tractor when I'm choring with names of people that I'm praying for or I could put this scripture here that tells me to pray for all things. I should put those things in my tractor because that's where I'm doing my praying. God touches my heart is times when I'm in my tractor.

It doesn't matter where you go to do this as long as you do it. I believe that you should take the time and shut yourself away from all other interference, other things that might distract you, and find scriptures that mean something to you. Study the scriptures and just refer to them and then start making a list of people that you want to pray for. People that you have concern for. I think like Miss Clara you'll see the results.

I'm not going to tell you the rest of the movie because most of you already have seen it. Those of you who haven't seen it will hopefully want to see it now. I think it comes out on DVD in a couple of weeks. I have the book too so if you want to read that after I'm done reading it again you can borrow it. Prayers are answered. Trust me on that. Tony and Elizabeth are touched, both of them, by the Holy Spirit and are touched so that they love each other the right way. I'll just leave it at that.

There's one other part to the movie that really struck me. It's toward the end when Miss Clara reveals to Elizabeth that she, Miss Clara, had asked the Lord to send her someone who needed to know more about prayer. She wanted the Lord to send her someone who needed prayer in their life so God sent her Elizabeth. She told Elizabeth that

someone had done that for her once and now she was just passing it on. Now it was Elizabeth's turn to pass it on to someone else.

Who taught you about Jesus? I don't mean like what your mother did telling you the story of Jesus but who taught you that Jesus was real and that He needed to be a part of your life? I am sure that for all of you who are here today there was someone that did that for you. There was someone that shared with you time and time again their testimony of Jesus and how He had been a part of their life and how He had answered their prayers. I'm certain of that because I know there was someone that did that for me and there's also someone that keeps doing that for me, keeps me on the right track.

You know when I decided to retire from teaching I wondered if that was really what the Lord wanted me to do. When I was teaching I was coming in contact with a lot of kids every day. I wasn't teaching at a very big school but I still had the attention of 20 to 30 kids in a class for an hour. It was a chance to get to know them, a chance to try to meet some needs that they had. The last years of teaching I was able to mentor some of the younger teachers and suggest things to help guide them along the way.

As I thought about retiring I thought that it was just going to be Debbie and me (and the cows) on the farm. Even now I go some days without seeing anybody other than Debbie. I don't get any phone calls. It's just us. It's hard to reach out to people in that situation if you are not reaching out to people on a daily basis. So I wondered if the Lord really wanted me to retire or did he want me to keep teaching. Did He want me to do something where I would still be involved with people?

That first year after I had quit teaching I got the chance to be the junior high wrestling coach at Mount Ayr and I was able to get to know some people. I like to think that I was able to touch some lives, not very many because we didn't have very many that went out for wrestling. Last spring I was certain that I was done with coaching and with an-

nouncing at games any more. I was not going to be involved in the school here in Mount Ayr. I was just going to stay at home and Debbie and I were going to do our thing. If we wanted to go somewhere we could. That's the way that our life was going to be. That was my plan.

I don't know how much prayer had gone in to that, probably not very much. Well, right before school started I got this email from the athletic director at Mount Ayr. He said that he wanted me to consider being one of the junior high football coaches. That was funny that I would get an email like that. What did I know about being a junior high football coach? That wasn't something that I had ever thought of doing before.

I often told the coaches what to do but as far as actually going out there and doing it I wasn't sure about that. I did know that this would give me an opportunity to get to know 30 some young men that I didn't know. I knew Josh (Tina's son) and maybe a couple of the others but I didn't really know Josh to be honest with you. He came to church here but that didn't mean that I knew him. I decided that I really wanted to do this. I thought it would be something good for me to do. It was a good experience. I talked a young man into helping me by showing the players what to do. I felt like I was maybe mentoring him a little bit too. I thought that was a good thing.

We need to pass it on. If someone has touched our lives and has done something for us we need to find someone that we can make a difference with. Sometime I'll tell you about Tim but that's another story. In the Doctrine & Covenants 16:3c-4a it says this. *Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; for, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him on conditions of repentance. And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth. Wherefore you are called to cry repentance unto this people. 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! And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy, if you should bring many souls unto me!

Like I told you I bought the book the War Room and I think I like it better than the movie because it explains some things more in detail. It expands on things more. God wants us to pray. He wants us to reach out to others. He wants us to share with them our testimony of Jesus in our lives. He wants us to love them. He wants us to focus on their needs so that we can love Him.

It's Christmas. It's a time to focus on family and friends. It's a time to focus on others. It's a time to remember the birth of Jesus, a time to remember the love that He had for us. Merry Christmas.

I'd like to close with this one little poem.

Twas the Days before Christmas

Twass the days before Christmas and all through the house
 Mother was scurrying, like a little grey mouse
 The stockings were hung, the tree was ablaze
 No one had time for a relaxing laze.

Lists of to do things, were strewn here and there

And dad, all he wanted was some time in his chair

The winds outside blew, swirling snow around,

While inside the children begged to visit Santa town.

Lists of "I want" appeared here and there

While mother was starting to pull out her hair.

Dad, he just chuckled as he mechanically applied

The skills of his dad-hood, readying bikes for their ride

When suddenly, a music box began to play

Of a night, when a child, lay in a manger filled with hay

As one after one of the shepherds and livestock appeared,

The silence grew louder than the noise of holiday cheer.

The wise men arrived next and were placed in the scene,

While the angel was reverently given her packed wings;

Mary and Joseph were next placed

near the bed

And at last, the small baby rested his head.

For a moment at least, the family was still

Forgetting the holiday bustle and swill

They bowed heads a little, and shed a small tear

Remembering the reason for their holiday cheer

This holiday season, I urge each to pause

In remembrance of the one, who for the season is the cause.

As you gather with loved ones in holiday cheer

Stop for a moment, to give reverence to the Christ child so dear.

Once the presents are opened, and the feast complete

All will be restored, as the season depletes

But the love of the Christ-child will last the year through

Happy holidays my friends, I love each of you too.

-Diane Goold, Christmas, 2015



WE ARE CALLED TO THE FULLNESS OF CHRISTIANITY

Brother Joel Loving Lamoni, Iowa December 20, 2016

Elder Gordon Winkler shared: This morning we have an interactive service planned. Our focus is on the gift of Jesus. If you would keep this in mind and keep your thoughts on that focus we think that you will find this to be very beneficial in helping you to have a better understanding of what that gift was that God gave to us.

Our call to worship this morning comes from the book of James. I did contemplate using many of the scriptures that we would think of as being most associated with Christmas. I'll leave the second chapter of Luke for you to read for your Christmas worship at home. But I believe the scripture from James reflects the Christmas season also. This is from James 1:17-18.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.

Brother Loving shared: Good morning. I hope you are ready for the adventure that's about to unfold. I have prayed long and studied a lot about this and tried to bring it together. I was joking earlier that it would be a bit of an adventure. You do your best for the Lord but you're not really sure how it's always going to come out. Nevertheless, I have faith that you'll respond with the same kind of conviction and character that

you've always exhibited.

I want you to be ready for experiencing this gift of Jesus today that we focus on. It's almost Christmas. Although I don't know that it's really accurate that Christ was born on December 25th, nevertheless, we'll follow this theme. I begin with the scripture from Luke 2:3-12. *And all went to be taxed, every one in his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David,) To be taxed, with Mary his espoused wife, she being great with child. And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was none to give room for them in the inns. And there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And lo, an angel of the Lord appeared unto them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. But the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the way you shall find the babe, he is wrapped in swaddling clothes, and is lying in a manger.*

This story is quite astounding because out of that context comes the perfect and infinite gift of God. The greatest thing to ever come to this planet, to humanity and to history is this baby in the form of Jesus in a manger, in a stable out with the animals because there was no room for them with the other guests who were staying in the inn.

Now I want to confess something here right now. As we focus on this baby, this manger scene in the context which is quite phenomenal, there is the tendency to reduce the gospel in order to understand it. We take it off in bits and pieces and we kind of shrink it. We put it in a bubble around us and our world and our culture and understanding but there is really this amazing infiniteness to this gift which is quite far beyond our capacity to imagine. I want

to capture that a little bit.

I want to talk up to this congregation. I'm not smart enough to talk down to you and I don't want anything I say to be seen as I know exactly what I'm talking about. I make mistakes. I'm worthy of your criticisms but I want to talk very humbly about what this gift is, this perfect gift in a way that's meaningful to you and to our Lord. Isn't the irony and the contrast fascinating?

Imagine you being selected, you've been chosen in heaven, you're going to be responsible for the circumstances of Christ's birth and you're going to have all the income and budget and planning and personnel and resources you want. You plan it. What would you do? These values of God seem to be so different than mine. He brings Christ into the world in such unique amazing circumstances. Would you have picked Bethlehem? Would you have picked a barn with animals and manure and hay? Would you have understood this amazing story unfolding in the Christ child?

You know I'm sort of amazed that people look at Independence and say, 'Well, that could never be Zion. Have you been to Independence? It doesn't look like Zion.' Yet it's about as close to Zion as the manger was appropriate for the birthplace of our Lord. Somehow God in His infinite, amazing, creative majesty picks this unique and wonderful setting to bring us the most perfect gift we have ever or could ever hope to imagine. He gives us this gift freely. Of course you know the most quoted scripture John 3:16, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish; but have everlasting life.* That gift was given to you. You have the gift of Jesus on your behalf. How do you understand or describe or respond to this perfect gift?

Gordon said this was going to be an interactive service and so I certainly want you to accept this gift in the spirit in which we would like to give it. (Envelopes were passed out to the congregation.) I don't want you to open these at this point, I just want you to hold them. Each one gets one. You can imagine what may be inside but remember this

is simply a gift. I'm going to ask you as you open the envelope in a few moments that you give it away. This is the one thing that I will ask you to when I tell you to open this gift. I want you to do the most sacred thing you know how. This gift of Jesus comes to us and we respond in various ways. This gift comes to you now as you set in your chairs and you respond as you will.

You may open it now. (Each envelope contained a \$20 bill.) I am not trying to be manipulative. I'm trying to humbly get us to think about giftedness. This gift has no value until you give it away. You can keep it. You can put it in your pocket. You can do whatever you want with it. It is yours to do as you see fit but it is given with the condition and the understanding that you will do something sacred with it. That's all I want to say. That's all I'm going to ask you. No more questions. No more instructions. You simply do the most sacred thing you know with it.

Brother Joel prayed: Almighty God, as we are about to participate in an offering, we would give ourselves symbolically into the mission and into the life of your Son Jesus which was given to us. May we return to you, out of the sense of the gratitude and overwhelming love that you have shared with us, some of that back. May we understand our roles as givers, as lovers of others, as participants in this wonderful creation. May we rise to the occasion and do that which is righteous even sacred for your glory and for your honor is my prayer in Jesus name. Amen. (Most put their envelope in the offering that was taken up.)

So how do we describe and respond to this perfect gift from God? We are not the first to struggle with this question. I want you to listen to this song. It's called Joseph's Song. This is a song that someone wrote with regard to their understanding of how Joseph would have felt as the father or the dad to raise Jesus. Listen to these words and put yourself into Joseph's shoes as he struggles with understanding the giftedness that has come to him and his responsibility.

Joseph's Song

How could it be



This baby in my arms,
Sleeping now, so peacefully?
“The Son of God,” the angel said,
How could it be?

Lord I know, He’s not my own
Not of my flesh, not of my bone.
Still Father let this baby be
The son of my love.

Chorus
Father show me where I fit into this plan
of Yours,
How can a man be father to the Son of
God?
Lord, for all my life I’ve been a simple
carpenter,
How can I raise a King, How can I raise
a King?

He looks so small, His face and hands
so fair,
And when He cries the sun just seems
to disappear.
But when He laughs, it shines again,
How could it be?

Chorus
Father show me where I fit into this plan
of Yours,
How can a man be father to the Son of
God?
Lord, for all my life I’ve been a simple
carpenter,
How can I raise a King, How can I raise
a King?

How could it be
This baby in my arms,
Sleeping now, so peacefully?
“The Son of God,” the angel said,
How could it be? How could it be?

I still can only imagine the struggle
that Mary and Joseph had in being the
parents and raising Jesus. Maybe you
struggle too with the gift of Jesus. How
do you accept it? How does it work for
you and how have you responded?

You know the one thing that occurs
to me in this giftedness of Jesus that
comes as we celebrate Christmas is it’s
such a wonderful gift, such an amazing
gift. Why did God wait so long to bring
this wonderful gift to mankind? Some-
thing like this should have been given
right off the bat, from the very begin-

ning. Right? Why did He wait? It is in
some ways a great omission of the Old
Testament that Christ is not named.
Now the Old Testament is all about
Christ, all about the Messiah but He re-
mains unnamed. It’s a rather fascinat-
ing omission when you think about it.
How can that be? There is a famous line
of a wonderful song, ‘We limit not the
truth of God by our poor reach of mind.’
There’s great truth to that but there’s also
the statement that I would make. We do
limit ourselves by ignorance of the truth
of God. His truth isn’t limited by what
our minds can get around.

The omission of Christ’s name in
the Old Testament is surely astound-
ing, isn’t it? And yet let me go back to
an early covenant with Abraham. This
comes from Genesis 17:8-10 in the In-
spired Version and God is speaking.
*But as for thee, behold, I will make my
covenant with thee, and thou shalt be
a father of many nations. And this cov-
enant I make, that thy children may be
known among all nations. Neither shall
thy name any more be called Abram, but
thy name shall be called Abraham; for, a
father of many nations have I made thee.
And I will make thee exceedingly fruit-
ful, and I will make nations of thee, and
kings shall come of thee, and of thy seed.*

I believe this is a physical or tem-
poral blessing, a covenant to Abraham.
In Genesis 22:20-22 after Abraham has
agreed to offer Isaac it says, *Thus saith
the Lord, I have sworn by myself, that
because thou hast done this thing, and
hast not withheld thy son, thine only
Isaac from me; That in blessing I will
bless thee; and in multiplying I will mul-
tiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and
as the sand which is upon the seashore.
And thy seed shall possess the gate of his
enemies; and in thy seed shall all the na-
tions of the earth be blessed; because thou
hast obeyed my voice.* This I believe joins
the original covenant but includes Jesus,
the spiritual blessing and covenant with
profound inclusion of Jesus Christ to
humanity.

You see the deeper truth is that
Christ was known by name from the
very beginning because God in His in-
finite and caring way and love for man-

kind had to reveal Himself to those
worthy of the testimony. It was not a
secret Christ was known. This is im-
portant to us in the Restoration. Jesus
Christ was known before He was born.
This is huge news and changes our un-
derstanding. I read from 2nd Nephi
8:2-4. *And now I, Nephi, write more of
the words of Isaiah (tying back to the Old
Testament); for my soul delighteth in his
words. For I will liken his words unto my
people; and I will send them forth unto
all my children: for he verily saw my Re-
deemer, even as I have seen him. And my
brother Jacob also, has seen him as I have
seen him; wherefore, I will send their
words forth unto my children, to prove
unto them that my words are true.*

As people of the Restoration we un-
derstand the Brother of Jared saw Him.
This is the antiquity of the gospel. It’s
old. More powerful and profound and
in its complete application it is more
modern and fancy than we can even
imagine. We fail I think sometimes or
have failed to understand the complete-
ness or what the purpose of the Book of
Mormon is. For those who don’t believe
it, for those who aren’t familiar with it



Joel Loving



why do they need the Book of Mormon? Is it essential? Is it necessary? It is under so much condemnation and there is so much ignorance about it. People won't even read it because they've been told to stay away from it. Why? It's quite amazing to me. The Book of Mormon is that testimony to this former knowledge of Christ and the necessity of the fulfillment of the former covenants which have to come to pass.

The family that knew Jesus, the Israelites, this Abrahamic covenant, Isaac and Jacob who had his name changed to Israel who has the twelve sons and the twelve tribes. They are the inheritors, God's chosen people out of this covenant. Jesus comes through the house of Judah and yet that house which is the only remaining intact house that we're aware of still doesn't believe in His Messiahship. How can this be?

Well, in the strange way we as Gentiles, inheritors of the House of Israel but as Gentiles, inherit this gospel story. I read from Genesis 9:18-23 which includes the everlasting covenant which is in the Inspired Version but not in the King James. This is an important covenant. Listen carefully. *And God made a covenant with Noah, and said, This shall be the token of the covenant I make between me and you, and for every living creature with you, for perpetual generations (It includes us.); I will set my bow in the cloud; and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember my covenant, which I have made between me and you, for every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant, which I made unto thy father Enoch; that, when men should keep all my commandments, Zion should again come on the earth, the city of Enoch which I have caught up unto myself. And this is mine everlasting covenant, that when thy posterity shall embrace the truth, and look upward, then shall Zion look downward, and all the heavens shall shake with gladness, and the earth shall*

tremble with joy; And the general assembly of the church of the firstborn shall come down out of heaven, and possess the earth, and shall have place until the end come. And this is mine everlasting covenant, which I made with thy father Enoch.

This then becomes the antiquity of the gospel story and the fullness thereof. The fullness of the gospel is an audacious phrase. For those who believe in Jesus we have the gospel. How dare you say the fullness of the gospel. What more can there be than Jesus? We believe. It's enough and yet if we're able to understand the larger picture, the growing picture, the infinite nature of Christ who can't be found and captured even in this wonderful theme, there is more. There is more and the Jesus who appears before this covenants with those people. They bear record and we have record of it in the Book of Mormon that says that when their children whom they knew would fall away return to those covenants and believe in Jesus they will embrace the truth.

Do you know what embracing the truth means? In its essence it means coming into a hug with Jesus. He knows you well and you know Him well, intimately, embracing the truth. All people must come to this understanding of who Jesus is and what He has planned from the very beginning.

I read to you from 1Nephi 4:14-21. *Behold, I say unto you, that the house of Israel was compared unto an olive tree, by the Spirit of the Lord which was in our fathers; And behold, are we not broken off from the house of Israel; and are we not a branch of the house of Israel? And now, the thing which our father meaneth concerning the grafting in of the natural branches through the fullness of the Gentiles, is, that in the latter days, (And this is what's so important. To understand the future we have to unlock the past. The Book of Mormon becomes this key, this bridge to what is about to come if we understand the past and the covenants which have to be fulfilled for that future to be everything it's supposed to be.) when our seed shall have dwindled in unbelief, yea, for the space of many years*

and many generations, after the Messiah shall be manifested in body unto the children of men, then shall the fullness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles (the Book of Mormon), and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed; And at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; And then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; Wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer, and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved. And then at that day, will they not rejoice and give praise unto their everlasting God, their rock and their salvation? Yea, at that day, will they not receive the strength and nourishment from the true vine? Connected to Jesus, reconnected or shall we say restored to a knowledge of their Redeemer whom their fathers knew before He was born. This then is the fullness of the gospel restored.

Third Nephi 7:34-37 says, *And thus commandeth the Father that I should say unto you, At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations; And if they shall do all these things, and shall reject the fullness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fullness of my gospel from among them; And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them; And I will shew unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you, but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fullness of my gospel.*

Folks, there is something called replacement theology which basically says that because the House of Israel



and of the Jews blew it in understanding Jesus the story has gone to basically the Gentiles and the House of Israel has been left. But they will return.

As Restorationists we should understand this. This is what I see this Christmas morn, the timeful nature of God's greatest blessing to me and to you in the infinitely perfect gift of Jesus. Think of it. We in the Restoration have heard the fullness of the gospel, the fullness of the restored gospel, the fullness of the restoration God has in motion to bring His kingdom to earth and the return of Zion. This is salvation, temporal and spiritual. Not just that we die and we get to go to heaven and be with God. Heaven returns, Saints return to earth, God in possession of earth. Obey and this is what it really comes down to.

This Book of Mormon, the scriptures that we have, the Restoration, the story of Jesus, you know what He's calling us to? This is both the joy and the hope and the great salvation but also the indictment. You and I are called to the fullness of Christianity, not partial Christianity, not little Christianity, not where we see little bubbles of Jesus just in the manger and He'll save me. Now I need to get on with my life and my house and my dreams and my family.

The fullness of Christianity is what Jesus longs for in us. To understand what that means, a complete commitment, entire commitment to Him in His giftedness to us.

OK, you survived the sermon part. I would like a dozen or more volunteers to come up front to experience the giftedness of Jesus in a special way. I'm calling you to the fullness of Christianity. Those of you in the congregation please close your eyes and keep them closed. Do not open them. DO NOT open them. I just simply want you to absorb the gift that you are about to feel as people touch you.

Those of you up front I simply want you to respond to the prompts that I will give you. I want you to touch people in the most appropriate way that you know in the love of Christ as a gift as I give these prompts in response to what they say. You'll be mingling in the congregation quickly, touch one person and go to the next.

1. Touch someone who has made you smile.
2. Touch someone who means more to you than they know.
3. Touch someone who you have deep respect for.

4. Touch someone who you love to be around.

5. Touch someone who has influenced a choice or direction in your life.

6. Touch someone who was present for you during a difficult time.

7. Touch someone you feel has the pure love of Christ.

8. Touch someone in whom you see Jesus.

9. Touch someone that you would like to know better.

10. Touch someone who has deepened your walk with Christ.

11. Touch someone who has spoken God's words to you at some time.

12. Touch someone who you would sacrifice your life for.

Jesus is touching all of you now. OK you can open your eyes. Did you receive the gift?

Accurate in the calendar or not this is Christmas. We start with a babe in a manger but it quickly expands. It just goes everywhere and into you and through you and by you and because of you it grows. May the gift of Jesus ever be present in your heart. May you always give it away and may you answer the call to the fullness of what Christianity has always meant to those who know Him.



WHERE'S THE LINE TO SEE JESUS?

Elder Tony Crandell
Lamoni, Iowa
December 27, 2015

High Priest Alan Smith read *Mosiah 1:102-103* as a Call to Worship. *And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things, from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary. And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men, even through faith, on his name.*

As a scripture reading Elder Tony Crandell read from *Luke 2:1-7* and *2 Corinthians 9:15*. *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all his empire should be taxed. This same taxing was when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, every one in his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David,) To be taxed, with Mary his espoused wife, she*

being great with child. And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was none to give room for them in the inns. (Luke 2:1-7) Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. (2 Corinthians 9:15)

As you know, I occasionally have these Ah-ha Moments and you suffer because of them, as they invariably become my sermon topics. All who have



preaching responsibilities have difficulty in picking a topic.

I've heard Sherman, Rodney, Steve and others all say it always is such a struggle for them also. With myself it is more than a struggle, it is debilitating for lack of another word. I never feel good about a sermon after it is over. I always feel that I fell short of doing a good job. I remember Harry Black, one of the most prolific and capable RLDS speakers of the 60's thru the 80's, told us that preaching was so stressful for him he sometimes would throw-up before the service started. I thought...Boy; if Harry has this problem...there is no hope for me.

This particular Sunday of the year is extra difficult as we are just coming off the excitement of Christmas and entering into the bleak barren period prior to a start of a new year. It is also the new start for the Church year and a new start of the season.

It's sorta kinda like the weather. In a normal year, we would have snow over Christmas and then the muddy and barren periods of January and February. What I am going to say this morning needs to fill the gap... following Christmas and yet start to make entries on that blank sheet of paper representing the plan for the New Year.

Sandra suggested I talk about Christmas "Future." This last Tuesday night we went to West Des Moines for Lutheran Church of Hope's Christmas program. The pastor talked about Long-fellow's troublesome experiences with Christmas Past, Present, and Future. Sandra said, "You don't hear many sermons about Christmas Future" so there you go..." so I started to surf the term "Christmas Future on the Internet."

I happened on to a song that I have never heard before. I normally don't give contemporary Christian music or praise music a second look or listen; but this one caught my ear. I have mentioned to you many times, that Southern Gospel is my favorite as you can hear and understand every word. The Christ centered message is paramount. The music only supports the message. In Christian contemporary music and praise music it always seems to me the

music and rhythm are paramount and the message is in the background, which generally is very repetitive.

I did a little research to see who wrote this song and stumbled on its history, which I will share with you this morning. Ah-ha!! That was exactly what I needed for this morning. This story perpetuates the afterglow of Christmas yet gives you the hope of the future.

Here is the Story: A few years ago, while at the mall with his mother and grandpa, a four-year-old boy watched as children lined up excitedly to see Santa Claus. Having been taught as a toddler that Christmas is the holiday when Christians celebrate the birth of God's Son, with the innocence of a child, he asked his mom, "Where's the line to see Jesus?" If Christmas is Jesus' birthday, why don't we see him here in the store?

Overhearing this child's comment, his grandpa was so proud that little Spencer understood the true meaning of Christmas at such a tender age. But both mother and grandfather, Becky Kelly and Steve Haut, were so struck by the profoundness of this little boy's question and the message inherent within it that they collaborated together to write and record this song based on that experience. The Title is..... Where's the Line to See Jesus?

We read that out of the mouths of babes sometimes will come profound truths that many adults either may not or cannot understand.

Let's go back to that first Christmas morning. The line to see Jesus was long and distinguished---shepherds and angels all gathered to see the newborn King lying in a manger. These past weeks as Christmas was approaching, impatient shoppers stood in line at the checkout aisles, children lined up to see Santa, but, as little Spencer so innocently asked, "Where's the line to see Jesus? If Christmas is the celebration of His birth, then why don't we see him in the store?

You know, consciously or subconsciously, I think most people this time of the year are truly trying to catch a glimpse of the meaning or personage of

God. Christmas is that one time in the year, and maybe Easter is another, when many people make an extra effort... to find real meaning, to find real joy in their lives. This is when many people make an effort to meditate on Godly things and try to understand their personal relationship with God. They subconsciously think..."Maybe this is the year. Maybe this year I will find real joy and meaning to my life. Maybe this year I will be able to finally understand."

Let us imagine the world at the time of Jesus birth. Let us imagine what Mary saw. The world was very busy. Most people were traveling to their hometowns to register to be taxed by Caesar. Mary was one of those people. She and Joseph traveled to Joseph's hometown of Bethlehem. The people who lived in Nazareth were of the family of David and were on their way to Bethlehem. Each household returned to the town where they were born. So much hustle and bustle; everyone was so very busy. There were so many travelers, that Mary and Joseph could find no room at the Inn.

Mary gives birth to Jesus and lays him in a manger. But in that hustle and bustle most people did not notice them and for the most part people really did not care about Mary's predicament. It's not that people weren't interested in Godly things. It's just that to most people, in that time a poor couple having a baby had nothing to do with God. The world has not changed all that much. There is still the hustle and bustle. Everyone is busy. Does that mean that people still aren't interested in God? No. No matter how busy you are, deep down, there is a desire to understand the heart of God.

Many people leave the holiday period a little down-in-the-dumps, a little disappointed, and yet they do not really know why. Historically, there seems to be an increase in the number of people passing on after the holidays. Perhaps it's because they were looking for God, but never found him, at least in the places they were looking. Perhaps they had unrealistic expectations.

This morning, I want you to walk into the village of Bethlehem with me



and stand near the manger, and stand next to Mary, and see what she sees. What does Mary see? She sees a baby, yet she sees so much more.

I will now play a southern gospel song.

Mary, Did You Know?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will one day walk on water?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will save our sons and daughters?

Did you know that your baby boy
Has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered
Will soon deliver you

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will calm a storm with His hand?

Did you know that your baby boy
Has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby
You've kissed the face of God

The blind will see, the deaf will hear
And the dead will live again
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak
The praises of the Lamb

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will one day rule the nations?

Did you know that your baby boy
Is heaven's perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you're holding
Is the 'Great I Am'

Mary remembers the promises of God. And as she recalls those promises ...and stares into the face of that child, she realizes that she is staring into the heart and face of God. Then the shepherds arrive, and they tell her what the angels have said to them. They crowd around the manger, and gaze into the face of that child. As they do, they realize that they are gazing into the face and heart of God.

Then the shepherds leave, and Mary ponders all these things in her heart. Ev-

erything she needs in her world is right here. Everything that her hustling and bustling neighbors and friends could ever ask for is lying in the manger. The key to understanding God, the key to understanding the meaning of life, the key to eternity, is right here, lying in the manger.

Now let's pretend Mary lifts the baby out of the manger and hands Him to you. And there you stand, awkwardly holding the Son of God in your arms. As you look down into His face, you realize that you, too, are now looking into the heart of God. In your arms you have what everyone in the world is longing for. While the rest of the world hustles and bustles, there you are, in the quiet of the night, looking into the face of this child, looking into the very face and heart of God himself. And you think to yourself "Why would Almighty God do it this way?" Why did He choose this manner of presenting his "Plan of Salvation?"

Then you look out the door of the stable, and you see a shadow. It is a bright night; the stars are out. One star seems to be shining especially bright. You see a shadow, the shadow of a cross. And then—you understand. You understand that someday, God would condescend even lower than tonight; to suffer and die on a cross. You cannot help but feel a little sad as you look into the face of this child. But you also cannot help but rejoice because you know that this child will rise from the dead. You realize that the baby you are holding would someday set mankind free. That He would set you free.

You give the baby back to Mary. But before you walk away, you take one last look. You see God's love for you, His mercy, His wisdom, His forgiveness. God has touched you. God has touched you this night.

This year, just like every year, millions of people, both children and adults, opened millions of gifts. Some did not fit. Some were the wrong color. Or as the newlywed wife said after receiving an odd and unique looking dress from her husband, "Honey that dress is just too precious to wear." Yes,

many gifts will be returned, exchanged or kept in storage. But there is one Gift that meets everyone's need, one Gift that never breaks, one Gift that will never wear out. A Gift that is appropriate for a small child, a teenager, an adult, a senior citizen. Boy or girl, man or woman. The most valuable Gift of all, is Jesus.

Christmas is a celebration of the fact that "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) Thank God Almighty for his Son his Gift too wonderful for words.

When Mary touched the face of her new born baby, she was touching the very face of God. When she held her precious child in her arms, she was holding the greatest Gift has ever given, not just to her, but to all; the greatest gift the world has ever received.

As you gave and received gifts this Christmas, I hope you remembered that Jesus has given us the greatest gift of all. He has given us himself. Let us not forget that on our first day of eternity we will all stand in line to see Jesus. Where is the line to see Jesus? The line to see Jesus starts right here! All of you



Tony Crandell



have come this morning that you might wait to see him! He is here in this building and you will see him!

Where's the Line to See Jesus?

Christmas time was approaching
Snow was starting to fall
Shoppers choosing their presents
People filling the mall

Children waiting for Santa
With excitement and glee
A little boy tugged my sweater
Looked up and asked me

Where's the line to see Jesus?
Is He here at the store?
If Christmas time is His birthday

Why don't we see Him more?

As I stood in amazement
At this message profound
I looked down to thank him
He was no where around

The little boy at the mall
Might as well have had wings
As the tears filled my eyes
Thought I heard him sing

Where's the line to see Jesus?
Is He here at the store?
If Christmas time is His birthday
Why don't we see Him more?

Where's the line to see Jesus?

He was born for me
Santa Claus brought me presents
But Christ gave His life for me

In the blink of an eye
At the sound of His trumpet
We'll all stand in line at His throne
Every knee shall bow down
Every tongue will confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord

Where's the line to see Jesus?
Is He here at the store?
If Christmas time is His birthday
Why don't we see Him more?

Where's the line?
Where's the line?
Where's the line for the Lord?



Mount Ayr Restoration Branch
Winter Retreat
Friday-Sunday,
January 28-30, 2016
Camp Far Westa
Stewartsville, MO

Theme: "Drawing Together"

- **Bring snacks and gather Friday evening at the campgrounds.**
- **Saturday activities include classes by Rich Rupe and Ron Smith**
- **Sunday morning worship with camp breaking after a meal.**

No registration fee.
Bring bedding, scriptures, appropriate clothing.

Come share with weekend with us!



JANUARY

Happy Birthday to Gable Galusha (16), Jowett Bastow (26) and any others we missed.



JANUARY

Happy Anniversary to Ed and Diane Anderson (1) and Michael and Julie Jordison (7) and any one we missed.



January 2016 Schedule

Date	3-Jan	10-Jan	17-Jan	24-Jan	31-Jan	7-Feb
Speaking	Michael Jordison	Ed Anderson	Jim Barber	Gordon Winkler	Retreat at Camp FarWesta	Rob Rolfe
Presiding	Rod Bastow	Rob Rolfe	Sherm Phipps	Ed Anderson		Sherm Phipps
Pianist	Bonnie Major	Cheryl Phipps	Bonnie Major	Cheryl Phipps		Cheryl Phipps
Music Ministry	Steve Smith	Bonnie Major	Michael Jordison	Diane Anderson		
Family Devotions	Jim Barber	Winklers	Rob Rolfe	Bastow's		Lovings
Greeters	Jordison family	Bastow's	Jim Major	Joel Loving		Crandell's
Custodians	Lovings	Rowlands	Winklers	Crandells		Jordison's
Sunday Evening	PRIESTHOOD MEETING 8:30 AM at Potluck Dinner following service					
Location	Steve Smith	Rowlands	Ron Smith	Steve Smith	Rowland's	Ron Smith
Wed. Prayer Svc.	1/6/2016	13-Jan	20-Jan	27-Jan	3-Feb	10-Feb
Location	Steve Smith	Rowlands	Ron Smith	Winklers	Steve Smith	Alan Smith
Presiding	Rob Rolfe	Joel Loving	Michael Jordison	Steve Smith	Tony Crandell	Ed Anderson



Church of Jesus Christ Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

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www.gospelrestored.org



CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST - MT AYR RESTORATION BRANCH

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. (Revelation 14:6-7)

MORE NEWS AND NOTES

and gifts.

The branch caroling party was held Sunday, Dec. 20, with everyone meeting at the Ron and Di Smith home. Ten homes were visited by the carolers before a soup supper back at the Smiths.

A New Year's Eve party was held Thursday, Dec. 31, at the home of Ron and Di Smith with snacks and games.

Food collection Sunday

Remember that the third Sunday each month is the Sunday that we gather food for the food pantry at the Ringgold County MATURA Neighborhood Center.

Last month we had more than 80

items to share along with the special Christmas food shared.