

# Church of Jesus Christ

*Mount Ayr Restoration Branch*

# NEWSLETTER

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*Resurrection*



## News & Notes

### Community sing

A community sing will be held Sunday, March 13 at 5 p.m. at the Baptist-Presbyterian Church in Mount Ayr.

The branch has been invited to participate. Instead of Sunday evening in Lamoni, we'll participate in the sing and then have our regular meal at the home of Alan and Valle Smith.

### Easter activities

Special activities are planned this

month leading up to Easter Sunday March 27.

The community Breakfast With The Master series will be held again at the First Christian Church in Mount Ayr Monday through Saturday, March 21-26 at 6:30 a.m. each morning.

The Mount Ayr branch will be participating along with the United Church of Diagonal and the Community of Christ on Thursday, March 24. We will help with greeting and cleanup

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# GOD NEVER CHANGES

**High Priest  
Robert Rolfe  
Lamoni, Iowa  
February 7, 2016**

Brother Sherman Phipps shared as a call to worship 3rd Nephi 8:32-46 and Alma 15:55-57. *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. And I give unto you a commandment that ye shall do these things. And if ye shall always do these things, blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock. But whoso among you shall do*

*more or less than these, are not built upon my rock, but are built upon a sandy foundation; And when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon them, they shall fall, and the gates of hell are already open to receive them: Therefore blessed are ye if ye shall keep my commandments, which the Father hath commanded me that I should give unto you. (3rd Nephi)*

*I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he alloteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to their wills; whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction; Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; or he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires; whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience. Now seeing that I know these things, why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called? (Alma)*

**H**ow is your life going this morning? How about this past week? Or past year? Has anything changed for you? Do you have any “new” gadgets? Sometimes when we think something is new, it is only because we never thought of it before. Like the son who tells his dad that he learned at school that in some countries a man doesn’t know his wife until after they are married. His father replied by saying, “that’s also the way it is here, son.”

Ecclesiastes 1:9 says there is no new thing under the sun. What did Solomon mean about nothing new under the sun? I’m not going to get into that discussion today. But don’t our lives change from day to day? Do you think this morning that your life is staying pretty much the same from day to day and year to year?

When I was young, sometimes I thought that the day would never end.

Sometimes I would say I was bored. I learned not to say I was bored around my father, as I would be instantly assigned to fix fences, cut weeds or other jobs that I didn’t care for. Have the things in your life been changing? You may think they haven’t, but in some ways, for us, everything continuously changes. Let look back 100 years.

One hundred years ago we were fighting World War I. Even with the war, our federal budget was less than a billion dollars a year. A first class stamp cost 2 cents; a new home \$3,200; gas was averaging 25 cents per gallon (due to the war). The public rage was the Model T and silent movies. There were about 1.8 billion people on the earth in those days. Life expectancy at birth was 54.5 years. Only 13.5% had a high school diploma. The average annual income was \$687. Very few people would have had running water, electricity and indoor plumbing. That also meant no one had electric stoves, refrigerators, micro-waves, washing machines, TVs, computers, cell phones, etc. Women washed their hair about one time per month, using eggs and borax for cleaning. This is just a partial list. Has anything changed from 1915? (By the way, my mother was born in 1914.)

Our sitting President ran for office on the motto of hope and change. He has been successful in changing America as we know it. But is change something we should simply expect? If so, should we expect change for everything or just some things?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 says, *To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven; A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep,*



*and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.*

The most important thing to remember is that change is a way of life for man, but for God, there is no changing. There is no changing for God's word, or His salvation. His word and His salvation have been the same since before the beginning of time and until the end thereof. (Whenever that might be)

Third Nephi 11:9 and Malachi 3:6 say *For I am the Lord thy God, I change not.* In fact, the scriptures tell us that if God were to change, He would cease to exist. *Now the work of justice could not be destroyed: if so God would cease to be God. But there is a law given and a punishment affixed, and repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth: otherwise, justice claimeth the creature, and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God. But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead: and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; And thus they are restored into his presence; to be judged according to their works; according to the law and justice; for behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved. What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God.* (Alma 19:95; 104-107)

How about change in the human genome? I've been asked more than once in my life if I believe in macro-evolution; in other words evolution from primordial slime to a human being. I commonly reply, "I don't have that much faith." I have read discussions on the belief of evolution and the "missing link." But it is evident to me as an attorney that the evidence is simply not there. If we had that kind of evolution, the fossil record would overwhelmingly

show evidence of it. When I was trying cases, I would also try to point out the lack of evidence. If the evidence was insufficient, the case simply wasn't proven. The evidence simply doesn't support the theory, so the theory fails.

In Alma 16:51-56 Alma is having a discussion with an anti-christ, named Korihor. Korihor denied the existence of God and Alma affirmed there was a God. Let me start in verse 15 and read you a little of the exchange. (Alma to Korihor) *Behold, I know that thou believest, but thou art possessed with a lying spirit, and ye have put off the Spirit of God, that it may have no place in you; but the devil has power over you, and he doth carry you about, working devices, that he may destroy the children of God. And now Korihor said unto Alma, If thou wilt shew me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, shew unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words. But Alma said unto him, Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Shew unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion; Yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form, doth witness that there is a Supreme Creator: and yet do ye go about, leading away the hearts of this people, testifying unto them there is no God? And yet will ye deny against all these witnesses? And he said, Yea, I will deny, except ye shall shew me a sign.*

**B**asically Alma pointed out to him the testimony of the scriptures and, if you will, the testimony of the universe. When I look at the universe, I, like Alma, testify that it was made by a creator. The world was created. It is not simply an "accident or chance." I believe that the anthropic principle is correct. What is the anthropic principle? Anthropropic means related to humans and their existence. That principle basically states to me that the universe was created or designed specifically for man. From children's literature we might call

this the Goldilocks principle. Everything is JUST RIGHT.

Let me illustrate how the anthropic principle works. It has to do with "how much chance there is that something just happened?" This illustration is from the internet. You've just checked into your hotel room for a weekend's getaway. Thrilled by the accoutrements, you immediately walk onto the room's balcony to take in the eighth floor view. Unfortunately, the guardrail gives way the instant you lean on it. You plummet, falling head over heels toward the pavement of the street below. You scream but for some reason you don't feel the splat and splintering of every bone in your body. No, instead you find yourself immersed in an immense, soft bed. Of all the vehicles to fall into, you managed to hit an open trailer full of defective pillows from the local bedding factory. You should be dead, but you're not. How did it happen that all of these circumstances happened so you were able to live?

There are numerous things that exemplify the anthropic principle. I will list only a few. If the earth was closer to, or farther from the sun; if the earth was



Rob Rolfe





larger or smaller; if the sun was larger or smaller. If any one of these happened life as we know it would be impossible.

What are the mathematical odds of these events happening by chance? Fifteen years ago astronomers had identified more than 150 finely-tuned characteristics. As the number of "finely tuned" characteristics increased, odds of it happening by chance has now shrunk to less than one, in a number so large it might as well be infinity ( $10^{173}$ ).

I for one am glad that those things are not changing, or I wouldn't even be here. To evaluate just how small the chance that all of this happened by accident, consider this. What is the projected number of atoms in the universe? It is estimated that there are between  $10^{78}$  to  $10^{82}$  atoms in the known, observable universe. In layman's terms, that works out to between ten quadrillion vigintillion and one-hundred thousand quadrillion vigintillion atoms. Of course this only applies to the "known" universe. We don't have any idea of how many atoms there are in an unknown universe because it is "unknown."

The point I'd like to make this morning is that the chance of the earth and sun and so forth, being the size necessary to permit mankind to live here is about twice as large as the estimated number of atoms in the universe. To me, that means the discussion is over. The earth and sun, etc., are not here by chance.

I'd like to read you something that was written more than 400 years ago. To my knowledge, it hasn't been changed since that time. John 3:16-18 says *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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He who believeth on him is not condemned; but he who believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the Only Begotten Son of God, which before was preached by the mouth of the holy prophets; for they testified of me. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather*

*than light, because their deeds are evil. Think about it, this has never changed. From the beginning of time, wherever that was, to today, John 3:16-18 has not changed.*

Actually those words were written about 2,000 years ago, but they weren't written in English. This is a most basic principle of the gospel. But when it states that if we believe on Him, what does it mean to "believe on him"? In short, we should do the things He said. Not just obey His commandments, but everything.

**J**esus said, in Mark 16:15 *He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned. To Nicodemus in John 3 He said, you must be born of the water and the spirit. When Peter was preaching the gospel at Pentecost, you may remember that everyone there heard the sermon in his own language. They were so moved in their hearts that they knew they needed to do something!*

In Acts 2:37-38 we read *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

The best reason to be baptized is the simplest. Jesus was baptized. In fact He insisted on it. Matthew 3:41-46 says *And then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan, unto John, to be baptized of him; But John refused him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and why comest thou to me? And Jesus, answering, said unto him, Suffer me to be baptized of thee, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And John went down into the water and baptized him. And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and John saw, and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Jesus. And lo, he heard a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him.* His exact words were, suf-

fer me to be baptized of thee, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. I like the King James version which varies a little from our Bible: Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. I like the imperative in the KJV that says let it be so NOW. If Jesus, being perfect, thought He needed to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness, how can we, being imperfect think we don't need to be baptized?

Those of you here this morning that have been baptized have received the Holy Ghost, even if you were not aware of it at the time. That is the promise that is included in the prayers we are commanded to read before eating the bread and drinking the wine. Why? One, because it is a commandment. We are remembering the covenant we made at our baptism. Two, so we will have His Spirit to be with us!

What I am going to say next is to every person here. If you don't think you have God's Spirit in your life, would you like to? James says, we have not because we ask not. If you want God's Spirit in your life: Get down on your knees and ask, and keep asking until you get an answer. God wants you to ask Him. He wants to give you His Spirit. His Spirit is free; but it is not without a price.

Do we think that we can do as we please and still have God's Spirit with us? If the anthropic principle is true, we exist because God went to great lengths to provide a world that is "Just Right" for us. Let me recommend that if you want to live in that world, you need to become "Just Right" with God, just right; not too cold, and not too hot. Or in simple words, we should do the things He said.

In closing let me read the promise given in the Word of God given through the prophet Jeremiah 29:11-13 NIV, *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

This is God's plan for you today. May God bless you this morning as you seek His Spirit with all your hearts.





# WILL YOU BE MINE?

**High Priest Alan Smith**  
**Mount Ayr, Iowa**  
**February 14, 2016**

**T**oday's in Valentine's Day. I don't know if ever spoken for a church service on Valentine's Day before. I thought we've focus our message on Valentine's Day because of this rare auction.

I Just got back from visiting Erin and Peter and our new granddaughter Adella. Valentine's Day when you have a young family is a little different than when all the kids are gone. Instead of just two of you, all the kids have to get their Valentines ready for school. Helping out in Columbia, MO, I was in the midst of all that last week.

First of all there were the boxes to receive the valentines that had to be made. Esther is in preschool or her party was first. Erin and Esther had gotten together and made a love bug card holder. They began with a milk jug, which was painted pink. They cut a big slit near top of the plastic carton for a mouth. Two big eyes and two buck teeth were glued on, along with six arms and hands. Multi-colored hearts were glued all over the outside. Colored felt balls were used for hair and the tail that Esther made sure everyone saw. It was quite a creation.

I helped Esther put the finishing touches on her valentines. Erin had helped her make caterpillars out of tootsie pops. The glued eyes on the candy ball, and glued more felt balls along the stick to make bodies. Strings were added for legs to make caterpillars.

Esther then cut out hearts, colored them red with a red marker, and wrote

the name of the person the Valentine was to go to and her name on the back. The bug caterpillars were attached to the hearts with tape.

Millie made her own valentine holder at school, which was a good deal easier. We just had to help her find ribbon, heart doilies, yarn, heart stickers and the like for her to take to school.

Her valentines were made of tootsie pops as well. (Erin had a big bottle of them from some discount store.) Millie cut out tissue paper to make each pop into a pastel flower with the candy as the center of it.

Eli decided to recycle Esther's valentine holder for his fifth grade class and won the prize for the most unusual valentine's box. He bought his Valentines which were sports-themed with paper balls you folded and "kicked" through goals along with a Twixt candy bar.

The kids had fun with their parties, but soon the valentines were in the trash, the candy eaten and the celebration over. There was a lot of excitement in getting ready however.

My Valentine's Day observance with Valle was much more subdued. I usually get Valle some flowers for Valentine's day but the best laid plans didn't work this year. I set up a plan for her to receive a flower a week at school at beginning of her final week of school, but the flower shop fell down on the job and her special rose for Valentine's Day didn't get delivered.

I did pick up a card for her, but that will just get passed off this afternoon when I return to Columbia to help with Adella and Valle heads back home to teach school Monday.

But you know, it's not the cards, the flowers, the candy or the gifts that make

Valentine's Day most special.

It's communicating our love with others. It's here that actions show that we mean it when we say we love someone special.

I've brought along some boxes that are filled with valentines this morning. Like the little candies, these valentines say "Will You Be Mine?"

The boxes I've brought are the Bible, Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants. And the valentines? They are messages to us come from our creator who is wanting to have a special relationship with us. Will you be mine? That's one of the messages I want to share with you today from the scriptures.

(Valentines were then passed out to everyone in attendance with a short message and the scripture which went with it. These scriptures were then shared, with the branch asked to pay particular attention to the valentine they received.)

Let's start with one of the oldest valentines in the Bible.

"If you will be mine, I will be yours." I can just see it on the candy heart.

It comes from the covenant with Abraham recorded in Genesis 17:12-13:

*And thou shalt observe to keep all my covenants wherein I covenanted with thy fathers; and thou shalt keep the commandments which I have given thee with mine own mouth, and I will be a God unto thee and thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee and thy seed after thee, a land wherein thou art a stranger; all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.*

Or how about this one from Moses' time. *You are a special treasure to me.*

If you will be mine,  
I will be yours.  
Genesis 1:12-13

Be mine.  
Leviticus 20:26

You are a  
special treasure.  
Exodus 19:5

You are  
my child.  
Romans 8:16

You are  
born of me.  
Mosiah 3:8



That one comes from Exodus 19:5:

*Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine.*

The theme valentine is recorded in Leviticus 20:26, also from Moses' time:

*And ye shall be holy unto me; for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.*

There's one from Malachi which is repeated in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. It must be a special one. "You will be a jewel to me" it says in Malachi. 3:13-17. It comes with a bit of chastisement first.

*Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?*

*Ye have said, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?*

*And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.*

*Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.*

*And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*

*Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.*

We can be His, but it depends on our response whether we can be gathered as a jewel or not.

Jesus shared this scripture with the folks in the New World in 3 Nephi 11, where he shared scriptures that the people in the Americas did not have because they had been given after they left the Middle East.

The message about being gathered as jewels was repeated again in section 98:1a-b of the Doctrine and Covenants. This came when the Saints were being

driven out of Independence, MO.

*Verily, I say unto you, concerning your brethren who have been afflicted, and persecuted, and cast out from the land of their inheritance, I, the Lord, have suffered the affliction to come upon them, wherewith they have been afflicted in consequence of their transgressions;*

*yet, I will own them, and they shall be mine in that day when I shall come to make up my jewels.*

What God is asking us for is to have more than a passing relationship with him -- much more than just the valentines shared in preschool.

**I** sometimes wonder if need a spiritual Valentine's Day to freshen our relationship with our heavenly father. Sometimes we get in the same situation as the Brother of Jared when the people were leaving on their way to the New World. This story is recorded in Ether 1:36-42.

*And now I proceed with my record; for behold it came to pass that the Lord did bring Jared and his brethren forth even to that great sea which divideth the lands.*

*And as they came to the sea, they pitched their tents; and they called the name of the place Moriancumer; and they dwelt in tents; and dwelt in tents upon the sea-shore for the space of four years.*

*And it came to pass at the end of four years, that the Lord came again unto the Brother of Jared, and stood in a cloud and talked with him.*

*And for the space of three hours did the Lord talk with the Brother of Jared, and chastened him because he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord.*

*And the Brother of Jared repented of the evil which he had done, and did call upon the name of the Lord for his brethren who were with him.*

*And the Lord said unto him, I will forgive thee and thy brethren of their sins; but thou shalt not sin any more, for ye shall remember that my Spirit will not always strive with man; wherefore if ye will sin until ye are fully ripe, ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.*

*And these are my thoughts upon the land which I shall give you for your*

*inheritance; for it shall be a land choice above all other lands.*

I sometimes wonder about this. It seems so out of character that the Brother of Jared wouldn't pray at all for our years. I sometimes wonder if it was just that he was going through the motions and not really seeking the kind of relationship with God that he could have had.

Whatever the case, the Lord spoke with him for three hours. Know I have only actually heard the voice of my Savior once, and it was a few words. I can't imagine what it would be like to have a three-hour conversation, or even a three hour chastisement.

The Lord wanted the Brother of Jared to be his, and the Brother of Jared was caught up in the safety of the sea-shore and wasn't responding. Are we sometimes in a pretty place, doing well and not really paying attention to our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

What does that relationship look like if it is one where we are calling upon the name of the Lord? Alma give us a great example in Alma 16:218-224.

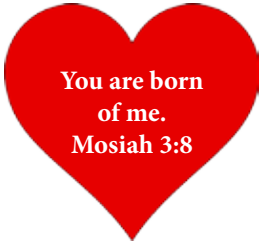
*Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you; yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save;*

*Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him; cry unto him when ye are in your fields; yea, over all your flocks; cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening; yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies; yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness.*

*Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them: cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase.*

*But this is not all: ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness;*

*Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.*



And now behold, my brethren, I say unto you, Do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance if ye have, to those who stand in need;

I say unto you, If ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith.

Now that's communication.

We need to:

-- Pray that God will have mercy on us.

-- Pray at work over what we are doing there.

-- Pray over our homes in the morning, midday and evening.

-- Cry unto him against the power of enemies and against devil.

-- Pray over livelihoods that will be blessed in work.

-- Pray for our own welfare and that of those around us.

And keeping up this communication on our own behalf isn't even enough. We are to use the blessings we receive to help others.

If the needy and naked, sick and afflicted and those who stand in need are going unattended to around us we are in for some chastisement -- as hypocrites who deny the faith. Our attempt to have the relationship that the Lord is offering is in vain.

Here's what Lord said about Independence saints on why they didn't have the relationship he wanted for them to be truly his. This is recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 98:2-4a

Therefore, they must needs be chastened, and tried, even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son; for all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, can not be sanctified.

Behold, I say unto you, there were jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous

desires among them; therefore by these things they polluted their inheritances.

They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble.

In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me.

Verily, I say unto you, Notwithstanding their sins, my bowels are filled with compassion toward them; I will not utterly cast them off; and in the day of wrath I will remember mercy.

**E**ven though we may be like those Saints in some ways in the way we have used the blessings the Lord wants for us, we have the promise that he won't utterly cast us off. And he wants much more for us.

But if we want to be his, we have to be more unified.

Behold, this I have given unto you a parable, and it is even as I am: I say unto you, Be one; and if ye are not one, ye are not mine. DC 38:6a

At the same time, we have a promise that his church as been called to help straighten things out.

And my vineyard has become corrupted every whit; and there is none which doeth good save it be a few; and they err in many instances, because of priestcrafts, all having corrupt minds.

And verily, verily I say unto you, that this church have I established and called forth out of the wilderness;

and even so will I gather mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, even as many as will believe in me, and hearken unto my voice. Doctrine and Covenants 32:1e-2b

So what kind of a relationship is God offering us with the invitation to be mine? He wants to be our Father and for us to be his sons and daughters -- peo-

ple born again into creatures of light. This point is made over and over again in some more of the valentines I passed out this morning.

This promise that we can be the sons of God is expressed by Paul in Romans 8:14-17:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption; whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God;

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

The valentine from John in 1 John 5:18 goes a step farther than being ad-



Alan Smith





opted sons and daughters to called us begotten sons and daughters.

*We know that whosoever is born of God continueth not in sin; but he that is begotten of God and keepeth himself, that wicked one overcometh him not.*

This concept is made even plainer and the place for daughters more explicit in the valentine shared by King Mosiah in Mosiah 3:8-11.

*And now, because of the covenant which ye have made, ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters:*

*For behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him, and have become his sons and his daughters.*

*And under this head ye are made free; and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free.*

*There is no other name given, whereby salvation cometh, therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God, that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.*

Alma shared this special valentine in Mosiah 11:187? Is this the valentine for you this morning?

*And the Lord said unto me, Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men, and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again;*

*Yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; and thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in no wise inherit the kingdom of God.*

What is the invitation that we are made? Alma explains it with great emotion in this valentine from Alma 3:57-58:

*Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men; for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith, Repent, and I will receive you;*

*Yea, he saith, Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely.*

Emma Smith received this valen-

**I will encircle you  
with my arms.  
D&C 6:9b**

**Fear not  
for you are mine.  
D&C 50:8e**

**You are my  
sons and daughters.  
D&C 76:3h**

tine, which we can also claim, in the Doctrine and Covenants 24:1a:

*Hearken unto the voice of the Lord your God, while I speak unto thee, Emma Smith, my daughter, for verily I say unto thee, All those who receive my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom.*

**O**liver Cowdrey received a promise that the Lord would encircle him in the arms of his love, a valentine for each of us today as well. This is shared in Doctrine and Covenants 6:9b-10c:

*Be faithful and diligent in keeping the commandments of God, and I will encircle thee in the arms of my love.*

*Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

*I am the same that came unto my own and my own received me not.*

*I am the light which shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.*

Listen to this valentine given to the elders of the early church, a valentine we can claim as well.

*Fear not, little children, for you are mine, and I have overcome the world, and you are of them that my Father hath given me; and none of them that my Father hath given me shall be lost;*

*and the Father and I are one; I am in the Father and the Father in me; and inasmuch as ye have received me, ye are in me, and I in you; wherefore I am in your midst;*

*and I am the good Shepherd (and the stone of Israel: he that buildeth upon this rock shall never fall), and the day cometh that you shall hear my voice and see me, and know that I am. Watch, therefore, that ye may be ready. Even so. Amen. Doctrine and Covenants 50:8e-g*

Joseph and Hyrum Smith shared this valentine with the world after their experience in the Kirtland Temple.

*and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the*

*Father; that by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created; and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God. Doctrine and Covenants 76:3h*

He wants us to be his children -- begotten children. Children who can share his inheritance with his son Jesus Christ.

So how do we respond to the valentines we have received this morning? What will you do with the valentine from the creator of the universe that asks us to be his?

We didn't have to make the valentine boxes when we receive valentines from our heavenly father. The boxes have been created by people over the centuries sharing their testimonies, prophecies and promises with us. All we have to do is look in them. Can we take it to heart that he really wants us to be his? I hope you will look for the Valentine's in the scriptures meant just for you at this particular moment of your life.

What will we allow to stand in the way of our relationship being closer to God? Can we learn to pray as God wants us to communicate with him -- over everything. Can we learn to share our blessings with others so we aren't consuming our blessings on just our own lusts?

Can we learn to live together as brothers and sisters in Christ? Can we become one so we are his?

We have the opportunity to have Valentine's Day every day all year if we will build the relationships of love with our Creator and with each other that he wants us to have. Like Enoch, our hearts can swell as wide as eternity as we understand and practice the pure love of Christ. Like Oliver Cowdrey, we can be encircled in the arms of God's love.

Happy Valentine's Day. Will we be His?







# CHOOSE YE THIS DAY!

**High Priest Sherman Phipps**  
**Lamoni, IA**  
**February 21, 2016**

Brother Gordon Winkler shared: We appreciate you all coming this morning. Out of all the many activities that you could do on a Sunday morning we are glad you felt that being here and worshipping Your Heavenly Father was the most important. For a Call to Worship Brother Winkler read Psalm 119:171-176. *My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes. My tongue shall speak of thy word; for all thy commandments are righteousness. Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts. I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee, and let thy judgments help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.*

**G**ood morning. This week and especially last night I was struggling trying to know what would be worthwhile for me to share this morning. One of the things in particular last night that I was struggling with was the scripture reading. I didn't want to just stand up here and read something to be reading it. I wanted it to have some meaning. Finally, last night I basically had to say to the Lord, 'Please give me a scripture. I don't feel like I'm getting anywhere here. If you want to use me tomorrow please give me a scripture.' And I still didn't have one. So finally this morning I basically had to say, 'Lord, I'll go because you've called me to go but I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing here. So I was sitting here wondering what I would use as a scripture when we sang the opening song "The Voice of God is Calling." I want to read this to you again as my scripture.

The voice of God is calling It's summons unto men

As once he spoke in Zion, So now

he speaks again:

Whom shall I send to succor My people in their need?

Whom shall I send to loosen The bonds of lust and greed?

I hear my people crying In cot and mine and slum,

No field or mart is silent; No city street is dumb.

I see my people falling In darkness and despair;

Whom shall I send to shatter The fetters which they bear?

We heed, O Lord, thy summons, And answer, "Here are we!"

Send us upon thine errand; Let us thy servants be.

Our strength is dust and ashes, Our years a passing hour—

But thou canst use our weakness To magnify thy power.

I have to believe that the Lord is trying to work here this morning after hearing Michael and Isabel sing, "How Great Are You, Lord!" Your song was perfect. That's where I wanted to start. I wanted to start by acknowledging God's goodness and His greatness and His love. He is amazing! I think everybody here knows that but I wanted to say it again this morning.

When I think back over my life, I am truly amazed at how He has been there, whether I knew it or not. Actually He's been there ahead of me, always preparing the way, always taking care of the things that I couldn't take care of. Of course, when I can take care of them it's because He provides and enables me to do so.

One of the reasons that I wanted to start out by praising Him and acknowledging His greatness was a scripture I read earlier in the week about Noah. How many of you are looking forward to spring? I am. After the waters receded and Noah came off the ark with his family, he was speaking with the Lord. I think it's amazing that he was speaking with the Lord.

We need to remember and understand that we can also speak with Him. There are a lot of examples of that in the scriptures. Noah asked Him to covenant with him that He would never destroy the earth and the flesh on the earth by water again, by flood as He had done. The Lord did covenant with Noah and there is an everlasting covenant that we have a record of in the scriptures.

Another thing I'm really, really grateful for is the scriptures that we have including the Inspired Version which includes some of these things that others don't have the privilege of having unless we take it to them. As many times as I have read about Noah I don't think it ever really registered with me that not only did Noah ask God not to destroy the earth by flood again but the other thing He asked him was that seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, may not cease with man. (Genesis 9:7)

I thought about that and the promise of spring, the promise of fall, and the promise of summer. I'm not thrilled about winter but winter has its purpose too. All of these seasons and the fact that we can count on them and that they're consistent are because God made them so. Apparently, He promised Noah that that would not change. He would not take that away from us. Can you imagine what it would be like if suddenly the seasons didn't follow each other like we have always known them to do? There are so many things that the Lord does for us that we just take for granted. We don't pay that much attention to them I fear.

So as I thought about that this week in terms of what God does for us, I was just overcome with how good He is to us. I thought here is God who created everything and yet He condescended to come upon the earth and take upon Him flesh and to sacrifice Himself in the form of His Only Begotten Son so that we could have eternal life, so that we could have the hope of salvation in

eternal life. Not just eternal life but the hope of salvation, the hope of coming back into His presence in eternal life so that eternal life is full of light and joy and hope and not darkness and despair.

A man came into the restaurant where we were having lunch this past week and he was huge. My thought was that he was the size of a bear. He was a BIG guy. He had with him a little tiny girl. He had her stuck under his arm and she seemed very happy with that. Then when he came in he sat down close to us and he was so gentle with her. She was all smiles.

I thought about how God is like that with us. He's huge, He's everything and yet He takes time with us every day if we let Him. He takes time to stop and kneel down and take our little hands like this man took the little hand of this girl, his daughter I assume. He's willing to listen to us and to pay attention to us and to make us feel good and to make sure we have everything we need.

Isn't that amazing? What does He want back from us? I'd be interested to know what everybody else's answer is because your answers and your thoughts might be a little different than mine, but we don't have time to go around and do that. By the time I thought about it for a while and tried to kind of melt it down I thought basically all He wants of us is to accept His love and to obey His commandments so that we will not be separated from Him. Then the other thing I think He wants from us, and that's why this song struck me as a scripture this morning, is He wants us to share the knowledge of His love and care and power with all those around us.

I think I've been guilty at times, maybe not so much consciously as subconsciously, of thinking of myself as one of His children and somehow thinking that makes me special. However, I know He loves all of His people. Every person He ever created. Can you imagine that? Sometimes it's hard with the people I deal with to imagine that they are God's creation and His people and that He loves them but He does. He wants us to share His love with everybody around us as much as possible.

I thought the other day about those scriptures that talk about how the field

is white already to harvest. We have several people in here who farm and deal with planting and harvesting a crop year after year. I thought so God has blessed us as a people. He's planted His crop so that it would be productive and be available to nourish and strengthen others. I don't think that's normally how we think about that scripture. Then He has called us in a lot of different ways to help Him in reaching out to those around us so that they too might know the joy that comes only from Christ and from God through His Son Jesus.

**E**ven back in the 1830s He was telling us the field is white already and ready to harvest. He was calling us to assist in that harvest. What if Jim went to all the effort to plant a crop? There is a lot more that goes into this than I can talk about but he took care of it and did all the things that have to be done in order to produce a good crop. Then he said to the one he was working with, 'I need to be gone for a while. I have other places that I need to work and so I'm going to leave you to take care of this crop.' How would you feel if you did that and you came back late summer or fall and looked out there and there were the fields that had produced a wonderful crop but nobody had bothered to harvest it.

I had this awful impression in my mind of looking out across those fields where the crops had rotted and died because I didn't go out and take care of them to make sure they were harvested when they needed to be. I couldn't imagine looking out at those crops that were all black and dead. I compared that with what I see when I look at the people that I work with all day every day and the people that I enjoy being with. I thought, Sherman what are you doing? I want you to think about this this morning. What are we doing to harvest that crop to make sure that God's creation, talking about mankind, is not lost?

Yesterday towards evening I was outside my garage in town. There is a fellow that I don't think lives in Lamoni but he is there frequently. I know him. I have represented him several times over the years and he's gone to prison several times. Not necessarily the times

I represented him. Originally I knew his family because I represented his mother and she had a lot of problems with the system too. He is kind of a deal. He is not the kind of guy I really like to hang out with in a way but in another way I feel something for him.

I was just coming back into my garage and I saw him down the alley a ways. He started waving at me. I didn't actually pull up there where he was at but I stopped and waited for him. One of the reasons I don't really like talking to this guy is because every other word is a curse word. He just can't talk any other way. That's the way he was raised and that is what he is used to. Sometimes all the cursing just gets to me and I don't want to hear it any more. Any way he came down where I was and started talking to me.

He told me his mother had died in January of this year and they still haven't had her service. He was pretty distraught about his mother dying. She is kind of the last of his family. He has a sister but I don't think they get along that well. He finally said to me, 'Sherman, I feel like an orphan. I don't have anybody.'

I wonder how many other people we come into contact with every day who feel like orphans because they don't know their Heavenly Father. I know Him and I should be able, somehow by His power and through obedience to Him, to share with my brothers and sister that they do have a Heavenly Father who loves them and knows them. I hope somehow this morning you will hear God's call to you and that you will see and understand how He has tried to call each one of us all through our lives. For our sakes, but also, for the sake of all those our lives touch.

One of the things I like to do is bear testimony of God and His goodness and the things He's done in my life. The important thing to me this morning that I wanted to share with you is as I bear those testimonies I understand it's not about me. It's about God trying to work with all of us and granting us the testimonies and the witnesses that we have so we can share with His children. Trying to work with us and solidify our relationship with Him so that we will



understand why He created us and what He sent us for and so that we will understand how He has a purpose for every person He created. We need to try to be sensitive to that.

I don't want to sound negative this morning but as you consider that I want you to remember also another scripture that is probably said in more than place. It's the scripture that tells us that we cannot serve two masters. We will either love one and hate the other or we'll give all our time and effort to one and none to the other. We have to pick who we are going to serve.

This is just kind of a sidelight too. I think it is always interesting how some of these things that are true pop up in places you don't expect them to. There's a Blues singer that I like and he has a song that says 'everybody serves somebody'. In this song he even gets into the fact that you will either serve God or the devil. I don't know if he really believes that but he's heard it. He knows it. It's a truth.

I want you to consider who it is you are choosing to serve today and each day as you go forward from here. You know you can say, 'I'm going to serve God,' but this isn't about saying we're going to serve Him. This is about doing it. This is about how you live every day. What do we give our energies to? What is the real focus of our lives.

You know I have to confess to you this morning. I feel a little guilty maybe a lot guilty because all week long I've been praying about today and saying, "Lord, you know I don't have anything to give these people unless you give it to me. I know my weaknesses and would you please forgive me of those things and allow me to share with these people somehow that will be meaningful to them that their relationship with you will be strengthened."

I've been praying about those things but the Lord didn't hand me a sermon. That's what I wanted so I could say, 'Well thank you, Lord.' But I wasn't getting that. In fact, I got frustrated, this is the thing I wanted to confess, several times during the week because right when I thought I was going to have time to work on my sermon somebody

called and they needed to be visited or somebody called and they needed to be administered to. I was getting a little frustrated and then last night I think the Lord was kind of chastising me, 'What are you talking about? Do you want to serve or not? You've had these opportunities this week and now you are going to complain about them?'

I think we do that sometimes. We say we want to serve Him but when He opens that field wide open before us and says, 'There it is. Go and harvest.' We're like well wait a minute. I really wanted to watch TV tonight or just sit and read a book tonight.

We can't serve both. We have to choose and I hope, brothers and sisters, that you really and truly will choose God because He's the only creator. He's the source of all life. He is the source of all order. Do you want to live in the light or do you want to live in the dark? He's the source of all light and unless we align ourselves with Him we'll have none of that in eternity.

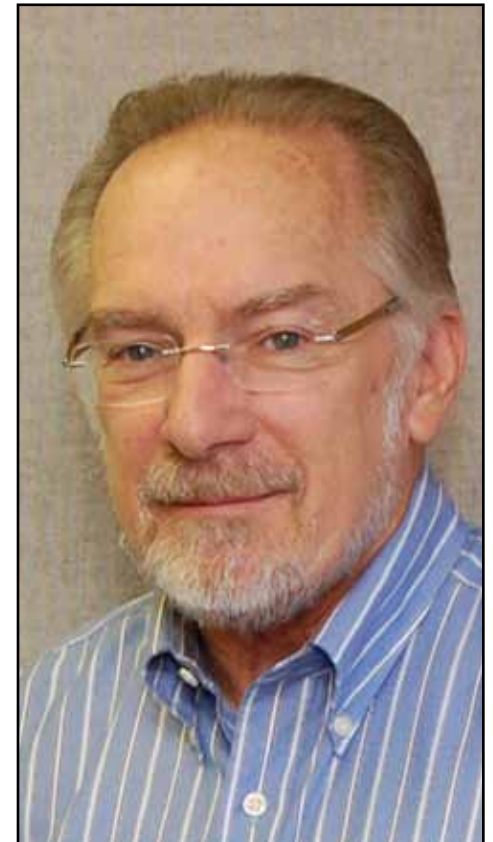
**W**hen I was a kid we lived out on the farm. We didn't really farm but my grandad did and we just had a little piece of land where we built a house and lived right next to them. We didn't have running water or anything. Can you believe that? We didn't even have our own well. We had to go next door to my grandad's to carry the water over. That meant that we had an outhouse which you don't want to put too close to the house for obvious reasons so it sat way out back. When I was six or seven years old I would wake up in the night needing to go to the bathroom. Boy I hated going out there in the dark. We didn't have security lights then either. I hated going out there in the dark. Who knows what's out there? I hated going in that outhouse too because who knows what's in there. There could be all kinds of creatures hiding.

My imagination could get carried away with all that. I think that might be one of the experiences that taught me to pray though because I prayed every time I had to go out to that outhouse that the Lord would help me and protect me. I don't know if this will affect

you but for me it's always been there in the back of my mind ever since. Do you want to live so that you can be in the light, where you can see what's going on, so you can feel comfortable which is what it does for me to be in the light or do you want to be cast off into darkness for eternity? Not only cast off into darkness but cast off into darkness with the adversary who you know hates you. That's not where I want to be and that's not where I want any of you to be or any of my brothers and sisters.

I hope that you will consider that and ask yourself where you want to be. Which master do you want to serve? Which one do I want to anticipate will be there when it comes time to account for my life and say, 'Come with me,' the Father of Light or the father of darkness. Where do we want our brothers and sisters and loved ones to be?

There is another thing that I wanted to be sure and touch on so I'm kind of shifting gears in a way. I wanted to remind you of the scriptures, one of which is in Section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants. I've always thought it was neat



*Sherman Phipps*





that this was in the first section. When I started to read the Doctrine and Covenants of course I started with Section 1. Right off the bat one of the things that the Lord tells us through His prophet is the *weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh, but that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; that faith also might increase in the earth; that mine everlasting covenant might be established; that the fullness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple, unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers.* (D & C 1:4c-3) This is encouraging to me anyhow. I hope it will be to you too.

So the promise is to all of us even though we might consider ourselves to be weak and simple that we can be used in this work. That He will allow us to participate and to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world so there's no excuse for any of us. He's said clearly that He will use all of us, anyone who will respond to Him, who will repent and humble themselves. Are we willing to do that? Willing to repent and humble ourselves and be baptized and obey His commandments and be faithful to Him.

In my life I've found that there are points where I'm willing to do that. I might go to a retreat. I might come to a service that's really good where the Spirit is really working and say, 'YES I can do that! I will be faithful.' But then doing it is something else. However, we have to! And not just for ourselves. I'm looking out here in the congregation at Norman (Nelson) and thinking, It can be done. He's still here. He's still available to do anything that he has the physical capacity to do for the Lord. He still loves the Lord. He's an example to us and I'm grateful for that. But when I look around at all of you I find that in one way or another all of you are examples to me and we need to be examples to each other, that all together we can come to Christ and let Him do His work.

One other thing and then I'll quit. We talk about being members of God's

Church. I don't know what that means to you but when I read the scriptures I think it's pretty clear that those who do these things I just mentioned, humble themselves and repent and are baptized and obey His commandments, that's His church. It's not a matter of making sure that we're in this little congregation or that little congregation. It's a matter of making sure that we really do repent and humble ourselves and are baptized and that we obey His commandments every day.

When I say those things I feel like people are probably sitting out there saying, 'I know that and you've said it 14 times this morning already but I knew it even before then.' But somehow today it weighs heavily upon me that we need to really consider who we accept and choose as our Master, who we will follow and how that will affect our eternal status but also especially how it will affect the eternal status of those around us.

**E**very one of you has an opportunity to serve God every day. I don't care where you are out or what you are doing. If you are paying attention to the prompting of the Spirit you will have an opportunity to serve Him.

I went to Des Moines three days this past week for court. Every time I go up there the first thing I do is go up to the top floor of the Polk County Courthouse, go down to the corner office where the court administrator is and ask them where they are putting me that day. Then they tell me what room I'm assigned to and what I'm going to be doing. There are two women in the court administrators' office and they both do the scheduling of the cases.

When I walked into the office one day last week these women were just chitchatting with each other. Another person came in and got the attention of one of the ladies and they started talking. I don't know how this happened but it can happen if the Spirit is working. The one that was sitting closest to me started asking me questions about whether I thought there was a God. I said, 'Oh yeah. I know there is a God.' I had an opportunity to share a couple of

testimonies with her. I don't think she would have asked me if the other lady hadn't been distracted because she kept looking over at her and then she would look back at me.

I had an opportunity to share with her my testimony of God's love and she was on the verge of tears. She said, 'You really believe that? I always believed that but then my family began to treat me like there was something wrong with me because I'm not a medical doctor like my sister.' And she started telling me about her family. I said, 'No, I know that God loves every one of us.' She said, 'You really think that?' and I said 'Yes.' She said, 'Well, I'm so glad I talked to you because I used to think that.'

So I guess my only point is every day wherever we're at if we will live so we can be sensitive to the Spirit, the Lord will use us. Don't be discouraged. Don't give up. Don't quit trying to share His love.

That reminds me too that in John it talks about who His people are again. They're the ones that love each other and stay focused on Him and His love. That's all I came here for today was just to ask you to please choose God and obey His commandments. I don't think we do a very good job of that, speaking for myself at least, and don't quit trying to share with those around you because they need it. You know there are people around you every day that really need the gospel. Know this, if you stay faithful to God His promises will be absolutely true in your life. You will be amazed at what He will do for you. Some of you already know that but sometimes even when we know it's easy to forget. Don't forget what He will do for you.

My prayer this morning is that the Lord in His great kindness has touched your hearts and minds, and that you didn't just sit here and listen to me but that you've listened to the Spirit as it worked with you. In closing I want to read this scripture. I think it says what I wanted to say. *And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive, and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long suffering; being*



*temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; Asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God*

*for whatsoever things ye do receive, And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works. (Alma 5:39-41)*

Brothers and sisters, I hope you will

be among those who always abound in good works because if you are the Lord will bless you richly.



# ARE YOU A SOWER?

**Elder Tony Crandell**  
Lamoni, Iowa  
February 28, 2016

Brother Joel Loving shared: Good morning. I welcome you here in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. I know there is a certain protocol of presiding and welcoming. There are things I'm supposed to say and behavior you're supposed to respond with but can we just be real and recognize that we're here today for a very holy purpose. The Holy Spirit is here to bless us, to touch us, to give us hope, to bring healing, edification and a wonderful sermon. I love to hear Tony. I know he struggles a little bit. I don't love that he struggles but I love to hear him.

I used to teach fifth grade. I had this sign up when you walked into the classroom that said, 'Thank you for coming' and then on the other side of the sign when you were leaving the classroom it said 'Thank you for making this a better place.' I hope you feel that way about this place. I hope every one of you feels like you've made this a little bit better place or maybe a whole lot better place because you've come today individually and corporately.

There is a phrase you often have heard, 'The truth shall set you free.' Where did that come from? Is that a political statement? Did some great statesman or king say this? Do you believe the statement the truth shall set you free? What if I said the truth will condemn you? Let me read the context of this so that we understand the seriousness of what's happening here for the truth will come. This is Jesus speaking to the Jews. When the Jews believed Him that's when this statement is made. I'm going to read from John 8:31-34. *Then said Je-*

*sus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. But listen to what follows. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man; how sayest thou, ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.*

I know it's boring and probably we might think overplayed that the scriptures say, 'Speak repentance, repentance.' I want you to know that my sensitivity today in putting this service together as I was preparing to preside was to say what I think the Lord would have us understand and that is simply this. The most powerful, the most wonderful, the most exciting thing we could do would be repent and be free from the shackle of sin indeed by the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

I turn to our Call to Worship with these words from the Doctrine & Covenants 83:7a. *And now I give unto you a commandment to beware concerning yourselves, to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life; for you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. Thank you for making this a better experience with the Holy Spirit.*

**A**s a scripture reading I would like to read from Matthew 13:1-8, 18-23. *And it came to pass the same day, Jesus went out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside,*

*and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up; and when the sun was up, they were scorched, because they had no deepness of earth; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them. But others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit; some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, and some thirty-fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. Then the disciples came and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? (1-8)*

*When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart; this is he who received seed by the wayside. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word and readily with joy receiveth it, yet he hath not root in himself, and endureth but for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also who received seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground, is he that heareth the word and understandeth and endureth; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundred-fold, some sixty, and some thirty. Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field; But while he slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. (18-23)*

As you have heard me say each time in the past, my sermons tend to be about things I don't completely understand, and my sermon preparation



causes me to research and study the topic until I feel I do understand. In the pursuit of that, I generally have an “Ah-ha” moment or two. Well today, I have two, and I will share those with you as we go along. As you have also heard me say, I looked forward to coming to this congregation because I knew you were a “witnessing” congregation and that is something I yearn for - learning how to witness.

The term “Witnessing” has always formed a picture in my mind of standing on a street corner and preaching to an empty space. That image has always been an intimidating one, and one that I always thought unproductive. Yet, the scripture keeps ringing in my mind, where we are told that the angels will rejoice and how happy we will be if but one soul is brought to Christ as a result of our witnessing effort. Yet, if I am going to “witness” I need to get busy, as I have many more days behind me than ahead of me. This sermon is really selfishly for me more than for you. I need desperately to begin the process of preparing myself to witness such that I might be a tool in the Lord’s hand.

Therefore, having said all of that, the parable of the Sower has always interested me and I had been thinking about it for a week or so prior to this month’s priesthood meeting. At that meeting one of our priesthood remarked that he had been attempting to witness and was not sure he was adequate to get the message across. He was asking for our prayers to strengthen his endeavor. That, coupled with what I had been musing about, has caused me to put together today’s talk.

In my study I have learned that it is possible to have an unrealistic biblical expectation; that somehow every time the word of God is sown that it is going to produce the same kind of harvest. But it is not! Some of it is going to fall on different kinds of ground and therefore having a realistic biblical expectation in our ministry is really important to help us have patience, and patience is going to help us persevere. There is so much to learn from this parable and when we learn it, it will help us to have encouragement, because we will then have

realistic expectations of what happens when the word of God is sown.

In verse 3, a sower went out to sow and he sowed. I want us to look at this in the perspective of the sower, and I want to speak to those of us who desire to witness as sowers. This story that Jesus tells in this parable is about what happens when the word of God is sown. Jesus is telling us what to expect when we engage in the ministry of witnessing. And particularly He is telling us we must not be unduly surprised or discouraged when people respond in different ways to the word of God.

When you become very discouraged in witnessing and are not having any success or response, keep this in mind: you cannot be a better teacher or a better witness than Jesus! No one ever taught more completely, more clearly, more compelling, more plainly than Jesus. But what did Jesus say? “But they did not understand.” Well, if that was the experience of Jesus, we should not be surprised when it happens to us. If it was the experience of Jesus, we should fully expect to occasionally experience the same.

**O**ften this parable is taught from the perspective of the soil because of the four different analogies of the soils, yet Jesus calls it the Parable of the Sower. This parable says that as we spend our efforts and time to expound the message:

1. First of all we will find many who are unresponsive.

2. Jesus says that there will be people who joyfully hear the word and will quickly receive the message, but it is just a passing phase. The verse of the parable I just read says to understand that and expect that.

3. Thirdly, you find people hear and receive, but they are distracted.

4. Fourth, there are those who hear, receive, and will act upon the word, producing much fruit...

Let’s look back at verse 7: “*Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.*” Jesus said the “Thorns grew up!” Ok! Here it comes. Ah-Ha! #1: This means that the thorns were not visible when the field was

sown. It looked like good ground when the seed was sown. So don’t visualize walking along the path just throwing seed into thorn bushes already visible and growing. The sowers did not waste seed by throwing into bushes and weeds. The ground looked like good soil. There was no evidence of any thorns at the time the seed was being sown.

But under the surface of the ground there were large root systems from old thorn bushes that had never been dug up. They had just been covered over. So when that seed went into that ground it was crowded out by the vigor of the established thorn bush root system. Thorns grow much faster than the seed. They choke the seed and over time will kill off the emerging life.

This is what we can expect as sowers of the word in America today. Many will receive the word as they profess a belief in Christ. But the root system of the American dream has already filled the soil of their life. Instead of digging out that thorny root system that is essentially about “me being everything I can become” and “my life being everything that I want it to be.” Instead of digging out that thorny root system they merely add faith in Jesus to what is already there.

So what they mean by faith is looking to Jesus to help them achieve their own dream. The ground of their life is already filled, with the root system of another plant that has never been dug up. Therefore, faith is professed and initially you have their attention, but there is no room for the word to grow. What is occupying their lives? Verse 22 says *it is the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of the world.* It is all about me!

The rich young ruler is a perfect example of this in the ministry of Jesus. I want my life to be everything it can be and oh, I want heaven as well. You know, I just want to make sure I have all the bases covered; and you know the rest of the story - how as he goes away from Jesus he is sorrowful! Why? Because the root system of his life was just full of the thorns of the “me life” of his world. As sowers today, you can expect to experience that! Jesus says you are going to find that; people who are pro-





fessing faith but there is no reality of a growing or emerging spiritual life. It is in name only, because the ground of their life is already full of a root that has never been dug up.

You will find as a sower of the word that there are some who are receptive and are abundantly fruitful. Look at Verse 23- What was sown on good soil? Here are people who hear the word of God and receive it; they grasp it, they apply it to their own lives and they become abundantly fruitful in that they see that God's word speaks to them, that God is willing to accept them as they are, God is willing to multiply whatever effort they put into their new life and it bears fruit in them.

Now, notice that God's word will be more fruitful in some true believers than in other true believers. The degree of fruitfulness that comes from the sowing of the word of God will vary even among believers; in one a hundred fold, in another 60 fold, in another 30 fold. The degree of fruitfulness will vary between believers. But, the distinguishing mark of all true believers is that the word bears fruit in their lives which is what Jesus was saying in the book of John. *In this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove that you are my disciple.*

You say "What is fruit?" Well, there is the fruit of repentance, of faith, and of hope, and of love, and of service, and perseverance, and of obedience, and humility and all of the fruits of the spirit, and on and on of the long, long list...the fruit of a godly life in all of its richness and all of its fullness.

So here is the great encouragement that Jesus is giving to all sowers of the seed. The living seed of the word will produce an abundant harvest, but understand it will not produce an abundant harvest in everybody's life. And even among those in whom it does produce fruit, it will not produce an equal amount of fruit; it will not produce an equal harvest in the lives of everyone whom is fruitful. The harvest will vary and you will not see this fruit coming immediately. This is the parable of the sower. But the seed grows over time and often the most immediate results tend

to be quite disappointing. Understand as we give ourselves to a life of witnessing there will be frustrations, there will be set backs, but God's word faithfully sown will raise a harvest of lives that are lived under the blessing of God's rule. That is what He is teaching in this parable.

Let me, in these last minutes, draw four conclusions or some very practical applications from what Jesus is teaching us here.

**Number one: Stick with the proper seed.** The fruit bearing seed is always the word of God - He who "hears the word." Jesus keeps repeating that phrase. The seed is the Word of God and the Word of God is the only seed that will bear the fruit of God's word in people's lives.

**H**ere is how a church can lose a fruitful and faithful ministry. What happens is this. Some well-meaning leadership observe what Jesus teaches us here - that the seed of the word of God does not produce an abundant harvest in every life. And they say for some people this seed is not producing a harvest so we have to consider them. So let's try some other seed. They are not responding, so let's give them something else. Is that ringing any bells in your mind? But here is the difficulty when a ministry goes down that road. Different seed will produce a different harvest. Different seed may include a circle of people in the group; the different seed may create an inclusive group experience, but it will not bring people under the rule of God. It will not produce lives that are aligned with the teachings of Jesus Christ. Only the seed of the unadulterated WORD of GOD does that.

So the expectation of Jesus was never to win the whole crowd; the goal of Jesus was always to draw out of the crowd people who would live under the exactness of God's rule. That harvest can only be raised through absolute adherence to the WORD of God. So I am saying from this passage of scripture, let's stick with the proper seed individually and together. Thank God for this congregation that now for over 20 years has stuck with the living seed of the word of

God and have said that that's what is going to be the absolute focus of our ministry. May that always be so! We have to understand, though, it won't raise a harvest in everybody. Stick with the proper seed!

**Number two: Exercise patience!** Remember seeds grow over time. Jesus told the parable of the sower, not the parable of the bomber. He does not say that a certain bomber went out and as he bombed, the whole face of the earth under him was immediately and completely changed. The truth is that sometimes that is the result that we would like to see; the immediate and total change in a person now! There are times in our frustrations that we would be happy to see God drop a few bombs. But Jesus is telling us here that God's work gets done by sowing seeds not by dropping bombs. The work of Christ gets done not by life shattering events, but by the faithful continual witnessing of the word of God. This is the living seed that bears fruit in one person at a time and one congregation at a time.

**Number three: Watch yourself.** This is Jesus's message to sowers. We as sowers must always remember that



Tony Crandell



the frustrations, the failures, the disappointments of our non-success can affect the soil of our own hearts. There is a path through all fields where the sower goes back and forth sowing. That path gets trodden or packed down.

Think of that path as the desire of spiritual success in your heart. The more trips you have to make back and forth hardens the path and can, if we are not diligent, harden your heart with disappointment. As we give ourselves to the ministry it becomes more costly, God asks more of us. Circumstances will arise in your life that will make it more difficult. When that happens, watch your heart that you do not lose your desire and the joy of sharing. As you give more of yourself to sowing, your life will become more crowded.

As God gives you more responsibility it will be harder to manage your life. As life becomes more crowded we have to watch that we don't become more like Martha, who loved Jesus but was concerned about many things, good things, things that were related to Jesus. Don't let our lives become so crowded with things that we are doing for Jesus that you no longer have room for Jesus in you.

**Number four: Trust the outcome of your ministry into the hands of God.** Always remember that God can change the hardest heart. There are times that you will wonder - there are times that you will wonder what has become of your seed that you sowed in a particular person's life. You have prayed for them, you have loved them, and it seems as far as you can see that all of your efforts and the efforts of others have been like sowing seeds on very, very hard ground. It is obvious to you that not very much of the seed remains. But I want you to think of this picture as you see that hard strip of ground, that path that goes through the middle of the field that has been widely sown. You do not know where God will be plowing next week.

Now here is the second Ah-Ha! Here is the good news; here is where I move from somewhat of a negative outlook to a very positive ending! In the time of Jesus, plowing was done

after the sowing and not before. Now think of that. Picture this - here's this strip of hard ground (the path through the field) and nothing seemingly remains on it. All of the seed seems to be plucked away; but now the plow comes and it goes right through the hard ground as well as the good ground, and the seed that was near to the edge of the path suddenly gets tipped and turned. And now everything in our field of opportunity is changed. God's plow goes through and tears loose the hardest roots. God's plow will go through the stoniest ground. It can move the biggest boulders, and when God's plow comes, won't you be so glad you had planted the seed?

To close the service the song "Faces" by the group Greater Vision was played.

I dreamed my life was done  
I stood before God's son  
It was time to see what my reward would be.

With love He reviewed my life  
To count what was done for Christ  
For that is what will last eternally.  
See I'd done my best to share  
That Jesus really cares  
And He would save if they would just believe

Oh, but seldom did harvest come  
And so few did I see won  
Until the Lord said, "turn around and see."

(Chorus)  
Then He showed me the faces of the ones who'd come because of me.

So many faces that my life had led to Calvary.

All those years I thought nobody saw as I labored in lowly places  
That's when Jesus smiled and showed me all the faces.

He said though you did not see the yield,

You were faithful to plow the field.  
At other times you helped me plant the seed.

No matter how small the task, you did just as I asked

And thanks to you these souls have

been set free.

(Chorus)

Then He showed me the faces of the ones who'd come because of me

So many faces that my life had led to Calvary

All those years I thought nobody saw as I labored in lowly places

That's when Jesus smiled and showed me all the faces.

And for those years you thought Nobody saw as you labored in lowly places

One day He'll smile and show you all the faces.

.. the faces, you'll see their faces.



**MARCH**

Happy Birthday to Isabel Jordison (1), Kathy White (5), Tanner Rowland (11), Joshua Cowley (20) and any others we missed.



**MARCH**

Happy Anniversary to Jim and Linda Barber (30), Steve and Elaina Smith (31) and any one we missed.



# March 2016 Schedule

Date	March 6	March 13 Daylight Savings Time Begins	March 20 PALM SUNDAY	March 27 EASTER	April 3
<b>Speaking</b>	Rod Bastow	Steve Smith	Rob Rolfe	Sherm Phipps	Joel Loving
<b>Presiding</b>	Jim Barber	Michael Jordison	Rod Bastow	Tony Crandell	Gordon Winkler
<b>Pianist</b>	Cheryl Phipps	Bonnie Major	Cheryl Phipps	Bonnie Major - keyboard	Cheryl Phipps
<b>Music Ministry</b>	Michael Jordison	Diane Anderson	Recorded	Recorded	Sue Beck
<b>Family Devotions</b>	Anderson Family	George & Beth Knotts	Jim & Linda Barber	Tony/Sandy Crandell	Alan/Valle Smith
<b>Greeters</b>	Sue Beck	Jordison family	Tony/Sandy Crandell	Rod/Deb Barstow's	Joel/Deni Loving
<b>Custodians</b>	Crandell family	Alan/Valle Smith	Jordison family	Sherm/Cheryl Phipps	Ed/Diane Anderson
<b>Sunday Evening</b>	PRIESTHOOD MEETING 8:30 AM at church		Breakfast with the Master – Christian Church M-Sat 6:30 AM	Easter breakfast	PRIESTHOOD MEETING 8:30 AM at church
	Potluck Dinner following service		Food for Center		Potluck Dinner following service
	Rowland's	Steve Smith's	Ron Smith's	No fellowship	Rowland's
	March 12 – Men's lunch @ Pizza Hut				
<b>Wed. Prayer Svc.</b>	Mar 9	March 16	March 23	March 30	April 6
<b>Location</b>	Steve Smith's	Ron Smith's	Rowland's	Alan Smith's	Ron Smith's
<b>Presiding</b>	Sherman Phipps	Alan Smith	Ed Anderson	Ron Smith	Jim Barber

Those giving Presiding Ministry, please share your hymns with the pianist prior to that Sunday:

Call or text Bonnie Major - 515-289-0195 OR Cheryl Phipps – 641-442-5570 Thank you!



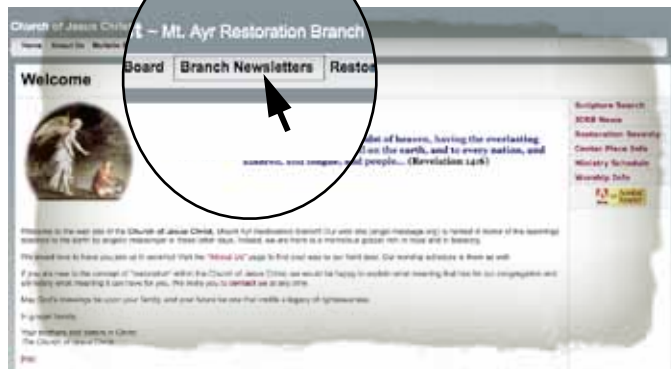


## Church of Jesus Christ Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

c/o Cheryl Phipps  
15581 270th St  
Lamoni, IA 50140

Have you misplaced your MARB Newsletter?  
Want to read it online or search past issues?  
Visit the Mount Ayr Restoration Branch website at:

[www.gospelrestored.org](http://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

*Continued from front page*

and provide the talk and ministry of music. We hope people can take time to participate during the week, but especially on Thursday morning.

We will be having our annual Easter breakfast to start our worship on Sunday, March 27. Watch for more details. There will be no fellowship that night. Look at the schedule for more details about special activities for the month.

### Stewardship accounting

Now is the time of year to think about preparing your stewardship accounting for the year as materials are gathered for income taxes.

Tithing statements are available on the JCRB website at [conferenceofbranches.org](http://conferenceofbranches.org). Go to the "Resources" button on the home page, then choose "Bishop's Corner." "Stewardship Forms" are listed and can be downloaded from the site.

What a blessing it would be to have all our members participating by filing a tithing statement this year.

### 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 117 items to deliver. We continue to be blessed by the response we make to help those in need.

### Valentine's Day supper

A special Valentine's Day supper was held Sunday, Feb. 14, at 5 p.m. at the home of Ron and Di Smith in Lamoni.