

# Church of Jesus Christ

July 2021

*Mount Ayr Restoration Branch*

# NEWSLETTER

2320 State Highway 2, Mount Ayr, IA 50854  
Co-Pastors: Joel M. Loving - Michael Jordison, Lamoni Iowa

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“But behold this land,” saith God, “shall be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles, and there shall be no kings upon the land which shall raise up unto the Gentiles; And I will fortify this land against all other nations, And he that fighteth against Zion shall perish,” saith God; “For I, the Lord, the King of heaven, will be their king, And I will be a light unto them forever that hear My words.” (2nd Nephi 7:17-21)

Happy 4th of July



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## America

*O beautiful for spacious skies  
For amber waves of Grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee,  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!*



***Christ's Great Sacrifice for Each One***  
***Priest Joseph Mickelson***  
***April 4, 2021***

*He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all... And He was numbered with the transgressors, and he bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:1-6,12)*

*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:1-3)*

As I looked to the east this morning at the beauty of the sunrise – the spring season revealing itself in the chirping of the birds and glistening grass turning greener by the day – I was reminded of the absolute beauty of the death, life, and re-birth cycle, upon which the entire world depends. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

There is life, death, and resurrection occurring all around us – each moment of each day. It occurs in the soil beneath our feet, amongst the animals of the woods and the livestock in the fields, and in our gardens and farm lands. We quite literally cannot live without sacrifice. Christ knew that better than anyone.

These days, I try my best to avoid the national news. Despite my efforts, I did see the headline a couple of days ago reporting the dwindling church attendance of our country's population. I believe the figure was 47%, down from the 70% range which held steady for several decades.

When I saw that statistic, I had a couple of thoughts run through my mind all at once. First, I

thought that's it's too bad. Next, I thought that it was not necessarily a surprising figure. Finally, and mostly, I thought that the wrong question had been asked. We, as a society, are prone to asking the wrong questions. I have come to the belief that the best questions – the ones worth asking – are the ones that cannot be easily answered, or, perhaps, the ones that cannot be answered at all.

For instance, instead of posing the question, “Do you attend church?” should we not first ask the questions, “What is the church?” “Who is the church?” “What role does the church play in the lives of its members?” “Does church attendance equate to salvation?” “Does church attendance equate to morality, love, and responsible living?” Perhaps, if we wanted to truly gauge the state of things, the question that should have been posed to these respondents would have been, “Do you love your neighbor?”

I don't mean to downplay the role of a congregation that meets together regularly. But I fear, that when we correlate, in terms that are black and white, church membership or attendance to the spiritual health of a people, we miss the mark. When our objective is to increase attendance on Sundays, we miss the point of what was done for us on the Cross. And we miss an opportunity to join ourselves in the membership of a community that expands far beyond these walls. A membership of colorful and diverse personalities – some of which make decisions we would disagree with, but all of which have love to share in their hearts.

It is a tendency of all – particularly, perhaps, of those of us who are tasked with standing in front of a congregation in an attempt to bear witness to some form of truth – to speak of things in broad terms. We present ideas and principles in terms that are often abstract, lacking the relatable context necessary to gain some glimmer of real understanding.

I can tell you that Christ died on the cross for the sake of all mankind. That is not a lie, but it is difficult for us to imagine, and, therefore, to feel. If we so desired, we could probably contrive some estimate of how many human beings that statement would encompass – but such a vast number would be beyond our comprehension, and would, therefore, lack meaning. The reason that so few people care about a national debt that totals \$27 trillion is because none of us really understands how 27 trillion units of anything looks or feels. It is beyond our limited experience and



comprehension, and therefore, tends to be shrugged off. If I tell you that Christ died for all, I present to you an abstract concept that is difficult to place into context, even if it is the truth.

Because each of us goes through our daily lives within our own unique context – formulated by the various experiences, decisions, and relationships of our time – I also cannot hope to properly explain to you what Christ’s sacrifice means to you. I can, however, attempt to explain what it means to me – within my own context – and hope that in so doing you will be better able to apply the work of the Lord within your own mind and heart.

In the farming world, when we say that someone is our “neighbor,” it could mean a number of different things. It could mean that the person being referenced lives across a gravel road from our home. It could mean that they live 5 miles away and out of sight, but with few inhabitants between their home and ours. It could also mean that they farm ground across the fence from ground that we farm, but live any number of miles away. Within the parameters of those definitions, I once knew a man who was our neighbor. Because he was our neighbor, I had known of him for as long as I could remember. I only began to know him when I was a freshman in high school, by which time he was what I considered an old man.

That year, I decided that I wanted to learn how to rope. In his younger years, this neighbor of ours traveled the country on rodeo tours. Knowing of his prowess with a lasso, I asked him if he’d be willing to teach me. He agreed instantly, and thus began a relationship that I cherish to this day.

Over the course of the next several months, I began to spend more and more time with this man. A couple of times a week, he and I would meet up at his barn to practice. I would stand and throw my rope at the roping dummy for hours, while he sat on his lawn chair and told me stories – some of which were true, some false, and all, I am sure, were embellished.

He told of his time crossing the country competing in rodeos. He told the genesis stories behind each saddle or belt buckle that he’d won in those events. He told of old friends who seemed to always get into trouble when he was with them, and of all the women who were so distraught to find out that he was a married man. He would sing me songs that he had written – most of which were written either for a good horse or a

good woman. He would ask about my family and my ambitions. Now and then he would try to sell me a horse for far more than it was worth.

Between the stories and songs, he would often spit his tobacco juice on the dirt next to him. Or, perhaps, he’d take a swig from a funny looking thermos that I would later realize contained a beverage that couldn’t be purchased unless you were of a certain age.

This man was, in some ways, rough around the edges. He was most certainly a flirt, a trait that seemed to only grow stronger as he aged, and he had his worldly vices which he unapologetically enjoyed. But he was also a man with a big heart. Whenever the topic of his children came up, the pride and love in his eye was obvious for all to see. The songs he wrote for his wife revealed a love that was pure and true. The time that he freely and excitedly offered to a young boy who wanted to learn to rope revealed the generosity within the man.

Not long ago, this neighbor of mine passed away. Because of the pandemic, his funeral, though still well-attended, was likely missing many who were mourning his loss. I was there, and the love that is revealed in grief made me realize just how much good was in this man – despite, or perhaps even because of, the rough edges.

I believe that when Christ ordered His disciples to go find a colt that had never been ridden, the vision of this old cowboy friend of mine was clear in our Lord’s mind. Jesus saw his face flash before his mind’s eye. He saw this man’s weaknesses and vices, and He saw the immense amount of goodness that resided in this man’s heart. Determined to save him, our Lord mounted the colt and set his gaze upon Jerusalem.

Throughout my childhood, I knew a boy who was 2 years my elder. He had a reputation as a bit of a troublemaker and a class clown of sorts. He almost always wore a smile, but it was also almost always a devious grin. He would make you laugh at the most inappropriate times, and often with the most inappropriate jokes. He was never a particularly skilled athlete, but he loved football and baseball. He hustled and worked harder than anyone on the field, and that smile never seemed to leave his face. He loved his friends dearly, which is perhaps why he enjoyed the atmosphere of a team and the inclusion that came with it. He was ornery and he was mischievous. He was also as loyal of a friend as anyone I’ve ever met. He was



kind, even if he expressed that kindness with sarcasm at times. And I'll never forget that smile that he always wore.

Around the 4th of July holiday, when this young man was just 18 years old, he took his own life. It came as a shock to all of us who knew and loved him. The struggles that he must have faced – alone and hidden – were unknown to us, but they must have become too much for him to bear.

I believe that as Christ came into the upper chamber with His disciples, breaking the bread and the wine, He saw the life of this young man play out. Jesus saw the battle and the struggle within this boy that none of us had the vision to see. And He saw, too, the smile on the boy's face that would light up a room; the love and camaraderie that the boy would cherish amongst his friends. So Christ's motivation to continue along the path that lay before Him was reinforced once again, knowing of the great need that this boy had for a Savior.

I knew a woman, though I did not know her as well as I would have liked. She was a school teacher, a mother, and a wife – and her demeanor and appearance revealed those facts to me as I remember the warmth of her face. She had the look of a nurturer, a caretaker, and one who could fix any problem that a child might have. With two children still at home in her care, she was diagnosed with cancer. She endured the physical, emotional, and spiritual ramifications of that diagnosis, while maintaining her duties as mother to the best of her abilities.

The single memory of her that I hold onto most is one in which the context is nearly entirely forgotten. I don't remember where we were, but I can see the place vividly. I don't remember why we were there, but the whole family was gathered. By this point, her body was weak and she was being ushered out of a church building in a wheelchair. Her siblings and parents, along with myself, stood outside. I remember turning and seeing her being rolled out the door towards me. She looked weak and tired. As she came even with where I stood, she looked up at me and I can remember being slightly taken aback by the strength that was in her eyes and her grip as she clasped her hand on my arm and simply said, "I love you." She died a number of years ago now. It was the first time I can remember crying over the death of anyone.

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. I believe that when our Lord was being

scourged, suffering the physical pains of the worst that men could do, He looked ahead to the suffering that this woman would also face in her lifetime. He saw that she would need something, someone, to cling to for hope beyond the limits of the physical body that would fail her. Rather than reveal His power and end the torture, He became resolute in His resolve to see it through to the end, so that she might have a source of light to which she could look in her time of need.

I knew a man who, by most accounts, was not worth knowing. He was a father of 5 children (with two different women). He was undeniably an alcoholic who often ran with the wrong crowd. His indiscretions, at times, placed his children in positions of harm – physically and emotionally. He died in his fifties, most likely due to the years of damage incurred on his lungs and liver from cigarette smoke and liquor.

I attended his funeral. Despite being relatively young, I knew that this was a man whose life had been largely defined by his weaknesses and sins. They had, in some ways, consumed him. However, I was also aware enough of my surroundings by that time to be surprised at the genuine mourning and grief that I witnessed in his children, his wife, and his friends. It occurred to me that I did not know the full story. The fact that even those who he had hurt would miss some part of him revealed to me that he had, at times, broken through the chains that bound him and expressed the love that dwelt in his heart. There was something worthy of redemption and salvation in his soul.

I believe that when Christ hung on the cross, He glimpsed the part of that man's soul that was worthy of the sacrifice being made. And it was not just of the soldiers surrounding our Lord being referenced when Christ uttered those miraculous words, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Today, April 4th, marks the 11-year anniversary of the passing of my grandfather. That day, too, was Easter Sunday. Grandpa Mick was, probably above all else, a man dedicated to stewardship. He committed his life to the care of his family, as well as the care of the little piece of earth that had been entrusted to him.

He was a man who had learned how to make due with less. His home, built by his own hands and largely comprised of used materials, was modest but practical. Most of all, it was a home that was welcoming and warm to all who entered. Nothing was fancy, but everything was well-kept – a demonstration of the pride



he took in his work and of the abilities of his own mind and hands. He and his wife (my grandmother) largely fed their household out of their own garden. His basement and his shop were always filled with old parts and tools that may prove to have some use down the road and, therefore, could not be discarded. I would often walk in through their front door to find Grandpa at work trying to fix some old appliance, machine, or trinket. To this day, I cannot look upon the waters of a pond on a still summer evening without thinking of Grandpa Mick. He loved to fish, and, he did it with purpose.

As a grandson, I am sure that I was sheltered to some extent from the struggles that Grandpa faced during his life. I can extrapolate, however, that there were many. I know, for instance, that he outlived his siblings – meaning that a certain grief must've been experienced for their loss. I know that, though he was able to make due on little, there were surely times in which he faced the stresses of crop failures, livestock losses, droughts, and floods.

I know that he lost a daughter to cancer. I have already told you the story of that daughter this morning – the woman, my aunt, who looked up at me from her wheelchair and said an “I love you” that I will always cherish. And, as a father myself, I can imagine somewhat the devastation that loss must've caused him.

When Mary came to the tomb and found it empty, I believe Christ was busy preparing my Grandfather's mansion. Being a modest farmer, however, I don't imagine a mansion – in the sense that we typically think of it – would be something that would hold much appeal for Grandpa. Instead, I believe what was prepared for Grandpa Mick was a pond dam, surrounded by a scene that would bear a strong resemblance to Decatur County, Iowa. On that pond dam would be a woman – my aunt and Grandpa's daughter – smiling at him and holding a rod and reel in anticipation of his arrival. Perhaps driving down the road would be Grandpa's neighbor, and my old roping buddy, Tot. All of this, because Christ is risen, and the price He paid on the cross was paid for Grandpa. And for me. And for you.

I have been caught up lately in a series of novels that chronicle the simple lives of a rural Kentucky farming community. I recently finished one of the books in this series, which chronicles the journey of a man who is seeking to find answers surrounding the murder

of his uncle. The narrator of the story was just 11 years old when his uncle was shot. We learn throughout the book that this man, Uncle Andrew he is called, is a bit of a vagabond. Uncle Andrew, though loved by his family and friends, is known for doing whatever suits him most of the time. He likes to drink, dance, and flirt. His life is riddled with moments of complete disregard, intermixed with moments of deep remorse and self-reflection. The overarching theme of our narrator's journey is simply to find out, truly and honestly, what kind of a man his uncle was. I want to share the closing statements of that book, given after the narrator has grown old and failed to find the answers he was looking for.

*Now that I have told virtually all I know of the story of Uncle Andrew and of his death and how we fared afterward, I see that I must return to my old question – What manner of man was he? – and make peace with it, for I am by no means certain of the answer. A story, I see, is not a life. A story must follow a line; the telling must begin and end. A life, on the contrary, would be impossible to fix in time, for it does not begin within itself, and it does not end.*

*Within limits we can know. Within somewhat wider limits we can imagine. We can extend compassion to the limit of imagination. We can love, it seems, beyond imagining. But how little we can understand!*

*Whatever he was, Uncle Andrew was more than I know. In drawing him toward me again after so long a time, I seem to have summoned, not into view or into thought, but just within the outmost reach of love, Uncle Andrew in the plenitude of his being – the man he would have been for my sake, and for love of us all, had he been capable. In recalling him as I knew him in mortal time, I have felt his presence as a living soul.*

*However we may miss and mourn the dead, we really give little deference to death. “Death,” a friend of mine said as he approached it himself, “is a convention... not binding upon anyone but the keepers of the graveyard records.” The dead remain in thought as much alive as they ever were, and yet increased in stature and grown remarkably near. The older I have got and the better acquainted among the dead, the plainer it has become to me that I live in the company of immortals.*

*One by one, the sharers in this mortal damage have borne its burden out of the present world: Uncle Andrew, Grandpa Catlett, Grandma, Momma-Pie, Aunt*



*Judith, my father, and many more. At times perhaps I could wish them merely oblivious, and the whole groaning and travailing world at rest in their oblivion. But how can I deny that in my belief they are risen?*

*I imagine the dead waking, dazed, into a shadowless light in which they know themselves altogether for the first time. It is a light that is merciless until they can accept its mercy; by it they are at once condemned and redeemed. It is Hell until it is Heaven. Seeing themselves in that light, if they are willing, they see how far they have failed the only justice of loving one another; it punishes them by their own judgment. And yet, in suffering that light's awful clarity, in seeing themselves within it, they see its forgiveness and its beauty, and are consoled. In it they are loved completely, even as they have been, and so are changed into what they could not have been but what, if they could have imagined it, they would have wished to be.*

*That light can come into this world only as love, and love can enter only by suffering. Not enough light has ever reached us here among the shadows, and yet I think it has never been entirely absent.*

*Remembering, I suppose, the best days of my childhood, I used to think I wanted most of all to be happy – by which I meant to be here and to be undistracted. If I were here and undistracted, I thought, I would be at home.*

*But now I have been here for a fair amount of time, and slowly I have learned that my true home is not just this place but is also the company of immortals with whom I have lived here day by day. I live in their love, and I know something of the cost. Sometimes in the darkness of my own shadow I know that I could not see at all were it not for this old injury of love and grief, this little flickering lamp that I have watched beside for all these years. ■ Wendell Berry, *A World Lost**

I have shared with you this morning brief snippets of the lives of a few who I have known and loved. These have been men and women who, in Christ's eyes, were worth the price that He paid. Some were saintly and exuded the fruits of the spirit. Some had significant failings in their time on earth. All had their faults and sins to bear. Each of them struggled and grieved at times. One or two would be looked upon by much of the world as beyond the reach of redemption.

My experience with them all has been that there have been times, some more than others, in each of their lives when light broke through the darkness and shined

upon others in the form of love. As I read the account of Christ's suffering, His crucifixion, and His resurrection, I am forced to ask myself, "what was His motivation?"

It is not good enough for me to say that He did it because He loves all of His creation, even though I don't doubt the truth of that. As I shared from the outset, statements like that provide little context, and are hard to grasp with any real sense of meaning.

What brings it home to me is to look at the lives of the ones I've lost; to wrestle with the good and the bad that I see in myself and in those around me. The conclusion that I come to is this: Christ performed this great act of laying down His life, because He saw something in each of these people that I've spoken of today that was worth saving. He sees something in me that is worth the price of death. He sees something in you that made all the pain, humiliation, and spiritual anguish that He experienced worth the cost He knew He must pay. I am not referring to a mere glimmer of light that is hidden in your heart, but rather an abundance of it that I know resides in each of you because it resides in all of us. He placed it there, He knows it better than we know it ourselves, and He is willing to take all of the darkness that attempts to subdue that light upon Himself in order to save what is worth saving.

All He really asks of us in return, when you get right down to it, is that we love one another. How much easier would it be to love one another if we looked upon each other with an understanding that within each of us there is something so beautiful that the Son of God died on the cross in order to save it.

*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:14-17)*

Mary Magdalene... came to see the tomb... and the angel said to (her) 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen.' Amen.

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***Covid Insights***  
***Priest Rodney Bastow***  
***April 11, 2021***

As a Call to Worship Elder Tony Crandell read John 20:26-28. *And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them; then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

It is strange how things work sometimes. Several weeks ago I got this idea that just kind of formed in my mind. I thought, 'I could make a message out of that.' At the time I hadn't even been scheduled to speak. I thought, 'I'll just save it. There will come a time when I can use it.' So that's what I am doing today. This message came to me some time back. I have to tell you it doesn't always work that way. This has been a lot less stressful knowing that I had something to speak on rather than waiting until the night before and not having something to speak on. I am thankful for this message. I think that God must have planted this in my mind so it must be the right thing to be saying. I pray that it is and that we will all be blessed by His Spirit today. To God I would give all the praise and the glory. May we be blessed with His Holy Spirit.

People have asked me what my topic was going to be for today. I really didn't know how to respond. I really hated to tell them. I didn't know how they would react to the topic that I had chosen. But what I want to talk to you about today is Covid. I know that is a well-worn subject. It's a political subject isn't it? Imagine a disease being a political subject. Who would have ever thought you could talk about a disease and it would be a political subject but it is. There's people on one side who say you should wear masks. People on the other side say you shouldn't wear masks. People say you should social distance. I'm not going to get into that part. I am just going to share some of the insights I have seen since this started and give you my perspective.

When it hit last year and it's hard to believe that it has been a year since it started, I really wasn't too worried about it. I thought, 'Well, in a couple of weeks it will be gone.' I certainly didn't think that it would still be with us today.

In Ringgold County we went several months without having a case of it. When the cases started coming you'd hear, 'There's a case of Covid in Ringgold County. Who is it? Is it so and so? Is it so and so? Is it so and so? Who is it? Have I been around them? Was I with them? Were they with me? Oh, that's who it is. Well, where did they get it? How did it get here?' It was really a strange time in my opinion. We were so secretive about it. It was like, 'Well, there's a masked murderer running around in the county. Don't know what we're going to do about it. I can't tell you his name but if he kills you, you'll know about it.' That's the way it was.

Now, most of you knew my mother. Mom had a different way of looking at things. Back when I was being raised there were all sorts of diseases. There was chicken pox, measles, and mumps. You name it, it was there. They didn't have vaccines for any of those diseases so my Mom's philosophy was that the more you got exposed to this stuff, the better off you were. I remember her sending us down to the neighbor boy who had measles. She sent my brother and I down there to this kid's room. He coughed in our face. We drank out of his glass. All of this so that we could get exposed to measles while we were still young rather than having this happen to us when we were older. Neither one of us got the measles so I don't know if Mom's philosophy was right or not. I kind of carried this philosophy with me a little bit because when our boys were little, Debbie and I both taught and we drug those poor kids everywhere. They had to go to this babysitter and that one and we took them here and there and everywhere. Sometimes I would take them to school with me. We had friends that had little ones about the same age but they were very protective of their kids.

So based on my past experiences I thought the more we were exposed to the virus, maybe we would build up an immunity to it. It didn't happen that way because we got shut down and isolated. For me I was isolated anyway. Who do I see during the week? I see Debbie, wave at some neighbors going by and a lot of times that was it. For a long time I didn't even know anyone who had it.

However, as fall came things started to change a little bit. When they closed school down in March 2020 we didn't have anybody that had the virus at all. There were zero cases of it clear from March through probably July or August. Once we started getting cases



of Covid, they opened school back up. I think a lot of it was the parents were just tired of being at home with their kids every day.

In the fall there began to be some cases and there was a death of a person that I knew in August. Then there was another one and you started thinking, 'Well, maybe this is serious. Maybe we should stay apart and wear masks.' In October I had a classmate who was a very good friend and he caught the virus. Larry and I grew up together and were in the same class. We went to church together. I'd like to change that some day and go to church together again. We still are fairly close and talk to each other ever so often. I found out that he had Covid and that he was in the hospital and was very, very sick with it. It bothered me that he had to be over there in the hospital right across the road from where I was living, and I couldn't go see him. It bothered me that he was there dealing with it all alone.

As soon as he got out of the hospital, I gave him a call to check on him and see how he was doing. He told me how terrible it had been. He said, 'You do not want this. I thought I was going to die. I was this close to being put on a ventilator. I lost 30 some pounds.' He kind of put me back on my heels a little bit about how terrible it had been for him. But he said that he was doing better now. The thing that cheered Larry up the most and kind of really got him back on his feet a little was that since he is a school bus driver and drives preschool kids back and forth to school, they had made him cards. When he finally got back they said, 'Hi, Mr. Rice. It's so good to see you.' They hugged him and did all the things you aren't supposed to do. He said that really helped him a lot and made him feel a lot better.

We had a good visit and he said he really appreciated me calling him. He thanked me for caring about him. We made plans to get together. We still haven't done it yet but we're going to go to Rumors Restaurant someday and eat together. I called him the other night and reminded him that we were still planning on doing that. He agreed that we would do it and that we would try to do it soon.

Close to the beginning of December I had another friend who tested positive for Covid. This guy was probably my best friend in high school, my very best friend, although he didn't come to our high school until his sophomore year and at first I didn't really care for him that much. Once we left high school we kind of

went our different directions. You know how that is. You graduate from high school and you never see some of those people again. I thought I would be close to Steve forever but it didn't turn out that way because we took different paths. This is not to say that I was right or that he was wrong but he got into drinking and gambling. Those just weren't things I was comfortable with.

Fortunately, Steve moved away. Now that sounds weird doesn't it? But it was fortunate that he moved up to Mount Vernon, IA and got a job. He got away from some of the things that he had been doing down here. Josh and Ryder listen to this very closely. He met a good woman. That made a big difference in his life. As Steve said, 'She was a woman of faith,' and she got his life back on track. She got him to being the kind of guy that he was supposed to be. They married and had three sons. They did really well. He was a salesman in a company and he was a good salesman because he was a good talker. Imagine me having a friend that was a good talker. He was very successful with the company and then the business went bankrupt so he lost that job but decided to go back to school and finish his degree which he did. He had to have three paper routes to support himself but he was able to do that. The family kind of struggled for a little while but then he got his degree and got another pretty good job and was doing really well. Then, as he says, one day he was in a place where he shouldn't have been. He let someone in his car that he shouldn't have let in. They offered him a pipe with cocaine in it and he decided to try it. He discovered cocaine and it ruined his life. He lost his job and his wife and his sons didn't want anything to do with him.

Before long he was just Steve all alone in an apartment. He went to rehab and went through it again. Finally somehow and I don't know how this happened. I think it was part of the rehab but he ended up down in Oklahoma. He went back to school to get his MBA and met another good woman. He got his life straightened out and became a professor at a Christian college and started serving the Lord by serving young people at that college. He had a great testimony of how he had come to know the Lord.

As weeks went by we kept looking to see how Steve was doing with the virus. We kept getting updates. We were told that Steve needed prayers. He was in the hospital so a lot of prayers were offered and then we





were told that Steve wasn't doing very well. He was on a ventilator and needed a miracle so the prayers continued. One of the last things I heard from Steve's son was that at the same time that his body was fighting his spirit was resting in peace with his deep faith in Jesus Christ. The next day after that message Steve died of Covid. I still struggle with his passing and I think of him a lot. I hope that he knows how much I thought of him, how much I cared for him. I wish I had told him I was proud of the way that he had turned his life around. One thing I have learned about Covid is that it takes us by surprise. If you love someone you need to tell them now because with Covid there may not be a tomorrow.

Ever so often since this started I'd wake up with a slight cough. I would think 'Boy, I don't feel very well. I have kind of a headache. Is this it?' So I would avoid certain things. I would avoid ball games. I would avoid funerals. I would avoid coming to church because I wasn't sure. I wasn't worried about getting sick. I just didn't want anybody else to get sick.

One day about the middle of January the same thing happened. I had a little bit of a cough that just wouldn't go away and I didn't feel very good. I was coaching at the time so I thought just to be safe, even though this was probably nothing, probably just allergies, I should go get tested because I didn't want to take the virus to the boys I coached if I had Covid. So I went and got tested and I was positive. Since I was positive Deb went and got tested the next day and she was positive. I thought, 'Well, OK in a couple of days we will be over this. It won't be that bad.'

But I got up one morning and I have a hard time going in the mornings anyway but I got up and started to walk down the hall and it was like I was drunk even though I don't know what being drunk feels like. I was banging off the walls. I couldn't stand up. I made it to the bathroom and fell down on the stool. Then went back out to the living room and said, "Debbie, I need to do something." She said, 'Do you want me to take you to the hospital.' I said, 'No, we better have the ambulance come here because I'm not sure I can make it that far.' It was just like if I moved I was going to pass out. It was such a strange feeling. People hadn't told me about that. People had told me about the cough and getting it in the lungs, the headaches and fevers but this wasn't something that I was expecting. So I went to the hospital and they kept me there for four days. They gave me, I call it President Trump juice, for four days and

then I came home. About the next five weeks I just kind of laid around. I got to know the TV series "Gunsmoke" really well.

Deb didn't have it quite so bad. That's easy for me to say but she had an infusion and I think that helped her. She was sick for a few days but she got over it a lot quicker than I did. She did lose her sense of taste and smell but she didn't feel too bad. I'll tell you there is nothing worse than your wife losing her sense of taste and smell because when that happens she doesn't want to fix anything to eat. I still had my sense of taste and smell. In fact I was craving food all the time but it was difficult for her to fix a meal. It was difficult for her to fix a meal and know when it was done because she couldn't smell it.

After we got sick we were overwhelmed with the number of people that were concerned about us - people on Facebook, on the phone, people who sent cards telling us that they were praying for us. That really got to us a lot. It's encouraging to know that there's so many people that care about you. We probably don't hear that enough. What was really encouraging too is people said, 'We're praying for you.' What does that tell you about those people? They must be people of faith. If they are going to be praying for you, they must believe that God will heal you and that was encouraging.

We pray for the sick and for the ones that have lost loved ones but sometimes I think we need to pray more for people that are having other problems. My nephew was with me the day before yesterday and we went fishing. He told me about the people that he was praying for. One of them was a friend of his whose husband had been cheating on her. I'm thinking, 'There are people like that around us who we really need to pray for. There are people who have alcohol problems like Steven had, drug problems like Steven had and we need to pray for them. I am not sure that I prayed for Steve when he was having his problems with drugs and alcohol. By the way, Steve has a church connection. He has a brother-in-law that is an elder in the church. I don't know if I prayed for him when I found out that he and his first wife were divorcing. I know that I probably didn't pray for him when he had that syringe loaded up with cocaine ready to end it all. I know I probably didn't do that but somebody did. Somebody was praying for Steve. Someone was praying for him otherwise he



would have probably gone through with his suicide attempt.

I do a lot of my meditating in the tractor. I listen to 107.1 which is a good Christian radio station. Ever so often you'll hear something on there. I think I have used this before and I can't remember how it all goes right now but it's something like "without faith, there is no hope." You've heard me say that before. There's another part to this and I can't remember what that was but do you know where that comes from? I just thought that was something that somebody had made up but that comes from Moroni 7:45-46, 48. It's from a sermon that Mormon was giving on the topic of faith, hope and charity. *And again my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope? . . . Wherefore, if a man have faith, he must needs have hope; for without faith there can not be any hope.* I thought that was kind of neat that I found that and that it was in the Book of Mormon.

The four days that I spent in the hospital were very difficult for me. I was all alone. Being in the isolation part of the Covid-ward is not a fun place to be because there is no one there. Luckily Debbie brought my phone or sent my phone in so I had it and did have some contact with the outside world but you don't even see the nurses that often. A strange thing happened while I was there. The first night when the lights went out I woke up in the middle of the night and I heard this funny sound. It sounded like a vacuum sweeper. I couldn't figure out what it was. Why would they be vacuuming my room at this time of night. The next day when the nurse came in I heard that same sound. It was her ventilator or whatever you want to call it that was giving her her air. From then on I could tell when someone was in the room because I could hear that sound but you just didn't see anybody. I think of what other people have had to go through, the people in the nursing homes, the people that were in long-term care like my friend Steve who was in the hospital several weeks alone, no one was there. I think how awful that must be. I wonder what we can do to ease the suffering.

One thing I suggested after I got out of the hospital was I was going to go around to all the windows and peek in and wave at the people but some people thought that would be a little scary and might frighten the patients too much so I never tried that. Maybe we should have a card party and write out cards

to those people and let them know what's going on, that we care for them. This is the thing that has bothered me a lot.

Early on during my illness I got up one morning and I was still a little bit wobbly and I thought, 'What if this is it? What if I am not going to make it?' I wasn't making any progress. When you get sick you think you are going to feel a little bit better each day but it wasn't happening for me. As that thought passed through my mind I realized I really needed to clean up my act. If I'm going to die I don't want to have been thinking about having anger in my heart or hatred for somebody. I really need to get myself straightened out so that if I should die I can die with a clean conscience. I was determined to be as good as I could be and it lasted the rest of the day. I heard on the radio, 'How long can we go without sinning? Can we go a week? Can we go a day? Can we go an hour? How long can we do that?'

Josh has sent out a survey that has some challenging questions on it. I'm not sure I can give you answers to all those questions, Josh. First question he asked was, Do you feel like you are growing spiritually? Josh, that's probably a no. The second question is, Do you feel you should be growing spiritually? Well that's definitely a yes. It has to be.

Back in 1947 we received a prophecy. *The work of preparation and the perfection of my Saints go forward slowly, and Zionic conditions are no further away nor any closer than the spiritual condition of my people justifies.* (Doctrine & Covenants 140:5c) Josh, I guess what I am saying is I'm not there yet.

Do you remember the song entitled "Live Like You Were Dying?" In that song these are some of the phrases you hear:

Live Like You Were Dying

*And I loved deeper*

*And I spoke sweeter*

*And I gave forgiveness I'd been denying.*

*He said,*

*I was finally the husband that most of the time I wasn't*

*And I became a friend a friend would like to have*

*And all of a sudden going fishin wasn't such an imposition*

*And I went three times that year I lost my Dad*

*I finally read the Good Book and I*

*Took a good, long hard look*

*At what I'd do if I could do it all again.*



When we were sick people were very, very good to us. They did our chores. They brought us food. They ran errands for us. They were friends like a friend would like to have. I need to be more like that. I need to let people know I care, not just with words but by my actions. We are to love the Lord and love our neighbor and that's what it's all about. Whether we are dying or building Zion that's what we have to do.

People ask me if I have recovered. Well, Joel, that depends on what you ask me to do. Sometimes I can't tell if the symptoms I am experiencing are from Covid or from old age. I fall asleep easily except when I am in bed. I am short of breath. It's difficult to stand for any length of time and it's really difficult to stand and sing at the same time. I can't work very hard for very long and there are things that I just can't do.

BUT Covid has taught me to take life one day at a time, to trust in the Lord and to try to serve Him the best that I can.

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***Do Not Turn Back!***  
***High Priest Sherman Phipps***  
***May 16, 2021***

As a Call to Worship Elder Steven Smith read Doctrine & Covenants 18:2k. *Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you by my almighty power; and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree, you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit.*

Good morning. I want to read two scriptures to you this morning. The first one is from Alma 10:27-29 and the second one is from Alma 16:227-229. *And now my brethren, I wish from the inmost part of my heart, yea, with great anxiety, even unto pain, that ye would hearken unto my words, and cast off your sins, and not procrastinate the day of your repentance; But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long suffering; having faith on the Lord; Having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day, and enter into his rest; (As you consider that remember that now is the time and the day of your salvation.)*

*. . . therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you. For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God: yea, behold, the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors. . . . do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end. Or as George (Knotts) would have said, 'Repent now and avoid the rush.'*

I have been really concerned about this morning. I don't know if I have to be. It's always up to the Lord so I would like, if He will allow it, that you would hear Him and not me.

I struggled with what I should talk about because as you know, I repeat myself all the time and I don't like that. On the other hand the gospel has always been the same from the very beginning. It's never changed and so I suppose there would be some repetition. I'll go ahead and say this now and then if you get anything out of the rest of it, that's good too. But if the Lord has been telling me anything this week, I think He's been telling me to say to you, 'Stop waiting. Stop delaying. Stop procrastinating. Start doing.' You know what you need to be doing and if you don't, I'm sure He would be happy to visit with you about that. I hope you believe that. I do.

I believe that since the very beginning of everyone of your lives, the Lord has been pursuing you. He knows everyone of us and I think this is true for everybody that has ever existed, past, present, future. He pursues us probably from before the day we were born. He wants us, He wants our souls to return to Him for all of eternity. He would like also very much for us to understand that during this probationary life, we can enjoy life and not wait for some far off time.

In the Book of Mormon when Christ appeared to the people, one of the things He said to them was, 'How oft would I have gathered you.' He says this three different times and in three different ways but He keeps telling them, 'How often would I have gathered you. How often would I still gather you. How often would I gather you as long as you will repent any time in the future.' He's kind of, I think, saying that to us today too. He's standing in front of us always, every day with His arms outstretched pleading with us to turn to Him.

I think part of what He was trying to convey to me was, I've been pursuing you all of your life, every day. When will you start returning the favor? When will you start pursuing me every day, every moment? When



will your minds and your lives be focused on me? I feel funny saying that to this group, whether it is those of you here or those listening and watching on Zoom because I look around and see just good people. I love you very much and I know the Lord loves you but there is still a lot He wants to share with you. There's a lot He wants to give to you. There's a lot He wants to do for you, but before that can happen, we have to really get focused on Him.

I don't know if you will do it right here this morning but today, before the day is over, I'd like you to take a few moments and think about how He has pursued you all your life. All the things He has done to try and make your life joyful, make your life whole, give you hope even through the midst of all kinds of problems and struggles.

I did a little of that this week and I thought about what a blessing it had been to have been born into the family I was born into. I hope all of you can say that. I thought, 'Oh, my goodness right from the very beginning He put me where I could hear the gospel and then I could look and see how He just continues to try and reveal Himself to us and calls after us.' So now He's asking us to do the same in response. To call after Him, seek Him out every day. Don't procrastinate. If you feel like you should be praying more often, do so. We all need to spend more time praying, more time studying the scriptures. I'm not going to go any further with this. You know what you need to be doing. You know what you've struggled with for years in some cases. We know the things we need to get out of our lives as well as the things we need to put into our lives.

Remember the experience of Elijah? He told the people to gather together all the prophets of Baal as well as the prophets of Jezebel. Do you remember how he had them set out the two altars. As Elijah was setting all of that up he said to the people, . . . *How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.* (Do you know what the response of the people was?) *And the people answered him not a word.* (1 Kings 18:21) I can see that happening. They just stood and looked at him. So, okay what do you want us to do?

I think we've done that too often with the Lord. He has said if you really believe in me, then come and follow me. (Those are probably familiar words to you.) But if you really don't think I'm your God, if you don't think I'm the one who created you and has sought after

you, then go ahead and do whatever you want. He always gives us our agency and our choice. I can't speak for anybody else so I'll just speak for myself but I'll ask you to be honest in looking at your lives. For me I think too many times I've just stood there and said, 'Well, yeah I believe. Now what?' Well, time is up for that. Time has passed for that.

If we say we believe then we need to start doing things the way He's told us to do them, not because He wants to be a dictator. He's not like the people we've got running the country right now. He says those things because He loves us and He knows the things He has commanded us are the best possible way to accomplish things. It is the best possible way to be happy. The best possible way to be allowed to return unto Him and spend eternity with Him rather than being separated from Him. He knows everything that's coming upon the world and He knows if we'll just obey His words, humble ourselves, repent and obey His words, (His commandments) we can get through all of that and be happy about it.

I could stand up here and talk about all of the things that are going on in the world right now. When you look at all the craziness that's in the world, it could be a little discouraging. But when you go and read the scriptures in some of the places where He talks about the last days, one of the things you will find is, 'We'll be gathered together to Zion with songs of joy.' It doesn't sound like we will be sneaking through the dark and worrying that we might be killed. He says we'll gather together with songs of everlasting joy. There are other things He says that should be encouraging to us.

I know another one I was going to be sure to mention this morning. If we talk about all these things that are going on, I probably don't even need to mention them but you know all the earthquakes, etc. Do you pay any attention to how many earthquakes we are having? That's one of the little things I look at about every day. I see how many earthquakes happen in a day and where. They are everywhere. There's an outfit that follows all the seismographic activity in the world and they publish that every day. Most of it I don't understand but I went and looked a couple of weeks ago and there had been over 10,000 earthquakes along the west coast alone that week. A lot of them you never hear about because they are not all that big but some of them are bigger. I would tell you if you went on YouTube and looked for that information and started checking it every day you



would find out there are pretty major earthquakes taking place all over the world regularly. There is hardly a day goes by that there isn't a major one somewhere. All I'm saying is the Lord told us that would happen before He returned again, and it would happen as the time approached for Him to return again.

What else did He tell us? Floods. There are floods everywhere. That's another thing I go look at every day. He says men's hearts will wax cold. Another weakness I have is I go look frequently at all the crime channel stuff and what people are doing to each other has escalated, definitely escalated. You can see that right here in this country.

So you can see all these fulfillments of prophecy going on around us and you hear from a number of voices. People saying the end of the world is upon us. Well, go read what it really says in Matthew 24:4. It says, He's talking about all these things coming and then He says in effect I'm talking about the end of the world. Then in parentheses He explains that. Jesus says, 'When I'm talking end of the world I'm talking destruction of the wicked.' So He's not talking about wiping us all out. In fact, He's talking about the destruction of the wicked, getting rid of all of these things that make life miserable, that cause suffering, that causes so much destruction. He's going to do away with those things; so rather than running around in a panic, we should have smiles on our faces and look to His words and rejoice. But not just stand there and rejoice, we need to be taking this message to the world. Ron goes to Africa a lot. I may just go to my neighbors. Some of you may not go very far geographically to share, but we all have people that we interact with every day that need to know there's hope. They need to see something other than what they're seeing on the media flashed before them all the time that screams doom and destruction. They need to know that God is alive and that He's working and that He's working in our lives. You need to share that. I know some of you do a lot but we all need to more than we have.

Another thing I wanted to focus in on this morning was when we talk about going and doing His work and doing His will, I don't know how to say this so it will really finally register in your hearts. Maybe it already has. In any event it is up to the Spirit to carry the truth to your hearts and I hope that what I am about to say is true. That is, if we're going to participate, if we're going to be involved in this in a way that brings

joy and happiness to us and those around us, we have got to do things the way God has told us. We have to learn to obey His commandments. It's not that hard really but we live in a world that's pretty much rejected Him and said no we don't need Him. Most of them don't believe but if they do they still think they are smarter than He is. We think we can figure all these things out ourselves and it won't be any problem. I think too many times I compromise. I think well that's probably not 100% right but it won't ruffle feathers. We should not compromise when it comes to God's word.

I wanted to tell you a little story this morning. It's kind of a simple story but I hope it will be of some worth to you. When I was about 7 or 8 years old I went to visit my grandmother in Des Moines. This was my grandmother on my Dad's side. We were not allowed to go to her house without parental supervision. It wasn't because of my grandmother. My grandmother was a wonderful person. She spent most of her life in a wheel chair and never ever complained. She was a very good person but she lived in that house and had no way of getting out and around. It was a little teeny, tiny house. It was because of my granddad that we weren't allowed to go there without my parents being there. Twice in my life growing up as a kid I remember my Dad leaving me there while he went and picked up building materials that he needed for a job. Both times my Mother was very unhappy when she found out.

This time it was just him and me and my Grandmother begged him to leave me there over the weekend. So he decided to do that. I feel sort of bad that I never ever spent hardly any time with her except those couple of days. I spent lots of quality time with the rest of my grandparents and really enjoyed them. It wasn't grandma's fault that she was denied and deprived of interacting with us kids.

Anyway, he left me. This was a long time ago and they still had streetcars in Des Moines and the tracks were built right in the street like train tracks. They ran off electricity so the cars had a pole that ran up to overhead electrical lines and that's where they got their power to run all over town. So my grandmother, and I know this was a very special occasion for her, wanted to do something good for me and she decided to give me 15 cents which was a lot of money for her and send me to the movies. She lived way out on the east side. Of course the movies were down town and she couldn't go with me. She gave me 15 cents. There was a



nickel for the movie and a nickel for the street car each way. I knew that was a lot of money for her and I knew it was a sacrifice for her to do that. I also knew my Mother would have a stroke if she knew I was riding a street car in Des Moines alone but I went anyhow because it seemed like it pleased Grandma.

I rode the streetcar and went to the movie, came out of the movie and I thought it would be really nice if I could take the remaining nickel and give it back to Grandma. Of course, when Grandma had done this she had said now you go up here to the corner and get on the streetcar and it will take you right to the movie house. When you come out of the movie you look for that same streetcar with the same number and it will bring you right back here so be sure and get on that same streetcar.

I was standing in front of the theater thinking there's the streetcar. It would sure be nice though to give Grandma back some of her money because I know how much she needs it. So I watched the streetcar come and go thinking to myself I can follow those lines and they'll take me back. Well, I found out those lines ran all over town. I just put the money back in my pocket and started walking. I kind of had a general idea of where I was going but I'd never been around Des Moines by myself before. I walked and I walked and I walked and it started getting late and the sun started going down. I knew that I was somewhere in the general vicinity because the neighborhood was terrible and that's where my grandparents lived, in a really bad and rundown neighborhood. I thought I was close so I kept walking thinking I'll see the street because I knew the name of street they lived on. What I didn't consider was that the street only ran for a block in front of their house. I should have known that because it was a "T" intersection at both ends. Well, I continued to walk and look for that street and kept thinking I would see it but I didn't.

Finally, out of desperation I stopped at a little neighborhood store and told the guy I was lost even though I was very embarrassed about it. He asked me what my grandfather's name was and I told him and he said let me look. He looked in the phone book and then he told me that I wasn't too far away. It was about 7 or 8 blocks further and he gave me directions and so then I went home and gave Grandma her money. She was very upset with me that I had not gotten on the streetcar. She had wondered where I was at all that time.

I hope you can relate that story somehow to our lives today. The Lord gives us instructions. They are not that difficult but we, maybe for good reasons-reasons that seem good to us anyhow, decide to do things differently than what He has told us to do. I'm not saying that you are doing anything terrible. Maybe we're just not being responsive. Maybe we don't expect Him to speak to us when we come to church and when we go to prayer service or daily in our lives because He will if we expect it and if we ask.

For whatever reason we stand and watch the streetcar go by thinking, I can get there on my own. Well, it didn't work for me and it won't work for us today. We've got to do it His way. He's very, very patient and long suffering with us. I appreciate that but if you look around at what is going on in the world, this isn't going to go on forever and we need to be responding to Him. We need to be doing things His way-now.

I don't know if you have been watching the ministers they have been arresting in Canada because they insist on preaching from the scriptures. That's getting pretty close to home. In spite of all these things and what is happening in Israel, we still have the Lord standing before us with His promises which includes bringing us through all of this. I don't mean we won't suffer because we have to suffer sometimes in order to learn, but ultimately He said I will bring you back to Zion singing songs of joy. In another scripture out of the Book of Mormon He said this storm will not reach my people. I think I quoted that a while back. Again it doesn't mean we won't be impacted and affected by it but ultimately His promises will be fulfilled in our lives.

The basic promise that you find is that He promised us eternal life. We all have eternal life. Once His Son Jesus was resurrected we had eternal life but we choose where and how we spend it. That's true now. This is part of it. We choose whether we have the Lord working in our lives every day or not. Every time you take the communion you're saying once again I promise to take your name upon me. I think when we do that we're saying I promise to do that worthily. I promise to do it in a way that will bring glory to your name and He promises us He'll always be with us. Do you feel like you have His spirit with you every day? I hope you do and I hope you experience it every day.

There's one other thing I wanted to be sure and mention this morning. I talk about the promises a lot



and you hear them from other people too but do you know who those promises are to? In a way I guess they are to everybody but they will bear fruit in your lives only if you repent and humble yourselves and obey His words. Otherwise, you are left separated from Him. So these promises ultimately are to His people. The good things are to His people and so He's called upon us to come out of Babylon and to obey His words. I am asking you again this morning, I'm not harassing anybody or trying to give anybody a bad time, but I'm begging with you, pleading with you like the words that I read to you when I began. I'm asking you from the innermost part of my heart to look at your lives and determine what needs to happen for you to have a very personal interaction with God in your life everyday. Not just for yourselves but for the sake of all those people around you who either don't know Him or have gotten frustrated and disappointed or decided to give up.

As I was trying to get ready for this morning I looked at myself and said you know you've let yourself get kind of discouraged. You shouldn't do that, Sherman. You should never give up not even in the least little bit. Then I read these words from Ammon. You know he had been out preaching to the Lamanites who were a wild, ferocious people. They hated he and his brothers and they normally just killed the Nephites. They had been out for quite a while and had been to a land where they were not well received. Finally, they went on their way and as they were traveling he said, *Now when our hearts were depressed, and we were about to turn back, behold, the Lord comforted us, and said, Go amongst thy brethren, the Lamanites, and bear with patience thine afflictions, and I will give unto you success.* (Alma 14:111)

So this morning if you have watched what's gone on with the church and in the world and it's become kind of discouraging. If your hearts are depressed do not turn back. **Do not turn back!** Bear with patience whatever afflictions are your's to bear. If you do this with an eye single to the Lord's, He says He will give you success. He doesn't say what that success will be necessarily but it will be the real thing and it will be worth more to you than anything the world has to offer. That promise is still there.

So this morning I am just saying don't turn back and quit procrastinating. Do what you need to do to have the door wide open for the Lord and to allow Him to work with you because He still has a great work that

He wants to do. And He wants you, each one of you, to be part of that work. You will love it if you do it. That's why He wants you there. It's because the best thing you could possibly have is to have Him in your life forever.

Hopefully, the spirit of the Lord will bear witness to you this morning that He is calling **you**. His promises are still sure. Do not turn back!

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***Forgiveness***  
***Deacon Robert Rowland***  
***April 25, 2021***

*. . . but verily I say unto you, I, the Lord, forgiveth sins unto those who confess their sins before me, and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death. My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another, and forgave not one another in their hearts, and for this evil they were afflicted, and sorely chastened; wherefore I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another, for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses, standeth condemned before the Lord, for there remaineth in him the greater sin. I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men; and ye ought to say in your hearts, Let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds. (D & C 64:2b-2e)*

Good morning. About a month ago Joel informed me that he had chosen me to speak again and immediately fear and anxiety set in. Then the next day the fear and anxiety was still there. Then as this morning drew near it was still there. I think that when I am chosen to speak certain things happen in my life. Lately in the last few classes that Steve has given one that really resonated with me for quite a bit was about forgiveness. There are some things that I will share with you. Once again this isn't really about me. Testimonies are supposed to be positive and there is some of that to what I am going to share.

I went through a deal here a few months ago with one of my family members that was a bit disheartening to me and it's happened a number of times to where it was really hard for me to accept. I was not willing to look past it. I held an extremely high grudge to where I would not speak with this person or anybody else really affiliated with them. In fact it even hurt my own life. I have learned in the last month and a half when it comes to forgiveness it seems like the older you get the wiser you get, that a lot of the ways that I carry



myself through life has been a lack of being able to forgive others. However, it seems that every time that we come on the first of the month and partake of communion one of the things that we pray for is forgiveness from the Lord. As I am doing this I realize that I am not willing to forgive people for what they have done to me or members of my family or friends.

I think Steve has shared with us during the class on forgiveness the pros and cons, not that are really any pros to not forgiving. The cause that I can share with you is I think not forgiving is unhealthy. I've noticed that when I was going through this period a couple of months ago I wasn't eating the way I should and not sleeping. I was averaging probably about three hours of sleep a night, tossing and turning, and ultimately when I woke up I was focused on what was not being done regarding forgiveness. I have noticed that I am a little bit short tempered with my students at school because I have a lot of time to think when I am driving back and forth to Marshalltown. As I get there I dwell on things that I probably shouldn't have dwelled on and when I get to class I take it out on my students. I take it out on my co-workers. I come home and take it out on my family. Really I am the one with the problem. I haven't been able to release that forgiveness.

The things that were happening were repetitive and that's why I was having a really hard time accepting it and being able to turn the other cheek, if you will. I think this was a blessing to me to be able to speak to you and prepare by reading through these scriptures. We are not necessarily supposed to forget what has happened. We are not supposed to condone it. We are supposed to forgive those who have trespassed on us in hopes that they do the same in case we trespass on them. In order to get forgiveness from the Lord we are to forgive others.

When it is repetitive from the same people, when do you say enough is enough? When we ask for forgiveness from the Lord how many times do we ask for the same forgiveness over and over again for the same issues. What if He said enough is enough.

I thought about this and I have since given partial forgiveness. It's not total forgiveness over what has happened. I am working on it but I do know that by doing this it has made me feel somewhat better. My family is being exposed to the individuals that have created this issue with me. We are communicating with

them. We are actually spending time together so it's getting better.

Psychologists say the definition of forgiveness is a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance towards a person or group of people who have harmed you regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness or not. Another definition is to wipe the slate clean, to pardon a debt. It's important to remember that forgiveness is not granted because a person deserves it. It is a lack of love, grace and mercy.

If all my children were here today they would tell you that when something happens that I don't agree with or that upsets me, I carry it with me for a long time. That's a really terrible trait to have because you just don't get past it. As I try to move on with all these things that have happened in my life that I haven't been able to forgive people for, I feel sometimes that when I take communion that I am really not worthy of doing so. I think about it all the time during communion.

It's human nature for us I believe that we are going to be lied to. We are going to be deceived. The world is what it is. These are things that are going to happen to us and how we handle them and deal with them is on an individual basis. Hopefully, the Lord is in your life to where you can go to Him and ask for guidance and direction on how to handle each instance. I am once again working on that.

Something else that came to mind when I was going through these scriptures was in Matthew where Peter went to the Lord and was asking how often do I forgive my brother who sins against me, seven times and Jesus said seventy times seven. I didn't understand what that meant. I thought seven times seventy-seven and I was trying to do the math. I thought I only have to forgive them 539 times. I thought that can't be so really for those that don't understand or maybe it's just me. I actually wrote the definition down. Actually they used seventy times seven. It an expression that symbolizes infinity. We're called as Christians to forgive an infinite number of times because that is the number of times we are forgiven by God.

When we fail to forgive it becomes inconsistent with the infinite forgiveness of God. Actually, when I read this on Friday when I was working on what I was going to say, I set back in my chair and thought, 'Wow, everything that we ask of Him to forgive and expect that to happen and yet all He asks us is to love one another





and live by His commandments. I for one fall short of that. It makes it really questionable on how I can ask Him those things and expect to receive them if I am not doing it in return.

Another part of this that I wanted to share and I think Steve brought it up today in class was on judgment. You know the scriptures say, judge not if you don't want to be judged. Because somebody does something or says something if you don't agree with it it doesn't necessarily mean that your agreement is right either. As a parent you try to guide and direct your kids and teach them the right way but if they decide to do something and continue to do the same things over and over again, it becomes more difficult for me for that forgiveness to be at hand.

It seems like I spend more time now praying for forgiveness than anything else. My wife will also share that my expectations of others are higher than maybe they should be. I'll tell somebody to do something and then I'll do the opposite. I'm not really being a good leader by example. I tell my kids to do something but then I don't expect myself to do it the same way. There's so much that I found going through this on forgiveness. There is so much in the scriptures. It's everywhere. I really believe that this is one of the most important things that the Lord wants us to do on a daily basis. It's something that we must do.

I also believe that even though I said you are not to condone what happened. You are not supposed to forget what happened at different times that went against you. I also believe that sometimes if you aren't around that person very much and you encounter them again and you keep bringing those instances of forgiving to your mind, I think it is a set up for failure. That's not to say that you should be able to ask for forgiveness and say you're sorry and have the slate wiped clean. I mean totally as far as forgetting what had happened. That's always going to be in the back of people's minds. There are things that have happened to me thirty, forty years ago that all of a sudden I think about and I am right back there again. I don't ever forget. They send red flags out on certain things that you encounter with different people that you've experienced this with somebody else before and you wonder if it is going to happen again. Is that giving forgiveness? I struggle with that. If I continue to remember and I say that I forgive them as long as I keep remembering them am I really forgiving them? That

goes through my mind a little bit and I struggle with that.

However, it's really hard especially if it comes to a trust issue. Forgiveness and not being able to forgive somebody makes it hard to trust and love them. If I can't trust that person do I really forgive them? I hope so. I am guilty of giving a few of my family members more the benefit of the doubt than I have others. That's not fair. I don't love any one child more than the other or any other family member more than any other. I hope I am not the only one that does that but everybody suffers from it. By not forgiving what is going on everybody suffers that you are around. I have actually been told that I don't look very happy and they want to know what is wrong. I don't say anything but I am dealing with it inside and don't want to share it because if I don't talk about it it doesn't seem as real.

I have a short explanation here that I'll share.

*So what is forgiveness by God? Humankind has a simple nature. Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden and humans have been sinning against God ever since. God loves us too much to let us destroy ourselves in hell. He provided a way for us to be forgiven and that way was through Jesus Christ. Jesus confirmed that in no uncertain terms when He said, "I am the way and the truth and the light. No one comes to the Father except through me." God's plan of salvation was to send Jesus, His only son, into the world as a sacrifice for our sins. That sacrifice is necessary to satisfy God's justice. Moreover, that sacrifice had to be perfect and spotless because of our sinful nature. We can not repair a broken relationship with God on our own. Only Jesus is qualified to do that for us.*

*At the Last Supper on the night before His crucifixion He took a cup of wine and told his apostles, "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." The next day Jesus died on the cross, taken the punishment due us and atoning for our sins. On the third day after that He rose from the dead conquering death for all who believe in Him as Savior. John the Baptist when Jesus commanded that we repent or turn away from our sins received God's forgiveness. When we do our sins are forgiven. We are assured of eternal life in heaven.*

*What is forgiveness of others? As believers our relationship with God is restored. What about our relationship with our fellow human beings? The Bible states that when someone hurts us we are under no*



obligation to God to forgive that person. Jesus is perfectly clear on this point. Matthew 6:16 states “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you but if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

*Refusing to forgive is a sin. If we receive forgiveness from God we must give it to others who hurt us. We cannot hold grudges or seek revenge. We are to trust God for justice and forgive the person who offended. That does not mean we must forget the offense. However usually that's beyond our power. Forgiveness means releasing from blame, leaving the event in God's hands and moving on. We may resume a relationship with the person if we had one or we may not if one did not exist before. Certainly the victim of a crime has no obligation to become friends with the criminal. We leave it to the courts and God to judge them. Nothing compares to the freedom we feel when we learn to forgive others. When we choose not to forgive we become slaves to bitterness. We are the ones most hurt by holding onto unforgiveness. When you release the wrong doer from the wrong you cut the malignant tumor out of your inner life. You set a prisoner free but you discover that the real prisoner was yourself.*

When I read this I could see that in myself and I hope that others that listened to this can relate to it. If you are having trouble with forgiveness like I am, I hope that you are able to forgive as time goes on. When you think about what Jesus did for our sins and yet you have a hard time forgiving others for what they do, nothing can be as bad as dying for somebody's sins. Yet God died for our sins so that we could forgive somebody else no matter what they did.

I'd like to get back to my having a hard time recently to forgive. I have a sister and I have shared a little bit about her before as well. The really sad thing is I can't remember now what the issue was that I couldn't forgive but it's been 20 years that we have not had a relationship. I am one of three children. I had a brother that took his own life because of Vietnam issues. My sister is really the only living sibling. She has a daughter in Des Moines that has two kids that I have never met and they just live in Des Moines where I work basically every day. When my mom passed away there were things that I wished that I could ask for her forgiveness on but I can't now. Jennifer is going to hold me to a lot of this stuff as time goes on. I know she is. You never

know what tomorrow is going to bring. These past couple of months that I have had these ill feelings about certain individuals, I have thought what if they aren't here tomorrow or I'm not here and I can't get back to that day and forgive them and hold them and love them again.

I believe that you have to live every day like it's your last day because there are no guarantees that tomorrow will come. When people cross you or do certain things it doesn't mean you have to run and hide. I wish I had Deni's ability that no matter what is going on I would reach out and spread the love and hug everybody no matter what's going on. I struggle with that. I struggle with that even with my family members but I am working on it.

In closing by going through the scriptures and looking up about forgiveness this is an endless discussion. I believe what you see in the scriptures, it goes on and on. I hope that those of you who are struggling through any issues on this matter whatever it is that you see past it, call that person up, try to bury what has happened. With my sister I could call her and ask for her forgiveness and give mine and I would probably hear a click on the phone. I'm pretty sure that's where it would go. When my mom passed I got a text message from my sister that said mom died. That was the extent of the conversation. It's sad to think that that's where we are at. Once again if anybody is troubled with these things I know talking to the priesthood helps, reading the scriptures helps. It has helped me these past few days. I am still not one hundred percent. I am a work in progress in many ways but my prayer is for all of you to be safe, love one another as you would love your neighbor and forgive easily.

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## Why we celebrate July 4th

When the initial battles in the Revolutionary War broke out in April 1775, few colonists desired complete independence from Great Britain, and those who did were considered radical.

By the middle of the following year, however, many more colonists had come to favor independence, thanks to growing hostility against Britain and the spread of revolutionary sentiments such as those expressed in the bestselling pamphlet "Common Sense," published by Thomas Paine in early 1776.

On June 7, when the Continental Congress met at the Pennsylvania State House (later Independence Hall) in Philadelphia, the Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee introduced a motion calling for the colonies' independence.

Amid heated debate, Congress postponed the vote on Lee's resolution, but appointed a five-man committee—including Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, John Adams of Massachusetts, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania and Robert R. Livingston of New York—to draft a formal statement justifying the break with Great Britain.

On July 2nd, the Continental Congress voted in favor of Lee's resolution for independence in a near-unanimous vote (the New York delegation abstained, but later voted affirmatively). On that day, John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail that July 2 "will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival" and that the celebration should include "Pomp and Parade...Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other."

On July 4th, the Continental Congress formally adopted the Declaration of Independence, which had been written largely by Jefferson. Though the vote for actual independence took place on July 2nd, from then on the 4th became the day that was celebrated as the birth of American independence.

Festivities including concerts, bonfires, parades and the firing of cannons and muskets usually accompanied the first public readings of the Declaration of Independence, beginning immediately after its adoption. Philadelphia held the first annual commemoration of independence on July 4, 1777, while Congress was still occupied with the ongoing war.

George Washington issued double rations of rum to all his soldiers to mark the anniversary of independence in 1778, and in 1781, several months before the key American victory at the Battle of Yorktown, Massachusetts became the first state to make July 4th an official state holiday.

After the Revolutionary War, Americans continued to commemorate Independence Day every year, in celebrations that allowed the new nation's emerging political leaders to address citizens and create a feeling of unity. By the last decade of the 18th century, the two major political parties—the Federalist Party and Democratic-Republicans—that had arisen began holding separate Fourth of July celebrations in many large cities.



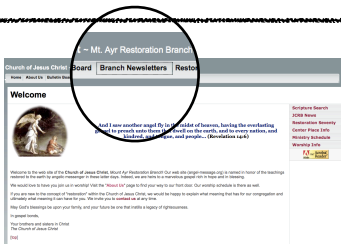
# Church of Jesus Christ Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

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



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Speakers for August

- August 1st - Ron Smith
- August 8th - Michael Jordison
- August 15th - Tony Crandell
- August 22nd - Joe Mickelson
- August 29th - Sherman Phipps

### August 15th:

*There will be a congregational meeting during the Sunday School hour.*

### August 29th:

*A business meeting will be held during the Sunday School hour.*

***Sunday morning services and Wednesday prayer services continue to be offered on Zoom. Go to [gospelrestored.org](http://gospelrestored.org) for information on how to do this.***

