

Church of Jesus Christ

Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

NEWSLETTER

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Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

But they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28-29; 31)



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NEWS & NOTES

September 24th-26th - Book of Mormon Retreat with Corey Stark. Friday evening and Saturday we will be meeting in Lamoni. Sunday morning Corey will be preaching at Mount Ayr. Lunch will be provided.

More information will be coming out soon. Please mark your calendars so that you can attend this retreat and learn more about the Book of Mormon and how to share it.



Who is this man Jesus?
Elder Tony Crandell
February 28, 2021

Tony's prayer: Lord Jesus, we ask you to reveal yourself to us as to who you really are. Let us view you with spiritual eyes. Let us see you as you see us. Magnify our understanding of your power, your glory, and your love and purpose for us. Amen

In discussing a potential sermon theme with Sandra earlier this week, she suggested it might be time to again focus on Jesus. Over a year's time here in church, we talk a lot about various doctrinal subjects, but I agreed that we needed to reacquaint ourselves with the man called Jesus Christ.

"Who is this man Jesus?" In just a month we observe Holy Week. Several questions that come to mind may help us answer that question.

Defining Jesus is a daunting task. For example, let me ask, who are you? Can you describe to me "who you are"? Men and women answer this question in significantly different ways. Women speak in terms of their relationships, their likes, and their dislikes. Men speak in terms of their jobs...things that they do...their accomplishments.

If I used this criterion to tell you who I am, I would have to list some of my accomplishments. I worked with my Dad in his plumbing shop and had a City of Boone Plumbing License. When I worked at the two Boone radio stations, I had an FCC Radio Engineers License. I worked in Law Enforcement and had a Diploma from the Law Enforcement Academy. I have a Pilot's license, served several terms on Lamoni City Council. I have an Elder's Priesthood card, etc.. I tell you this not to try and impress you, but to show that even with this list of some of my accomplishments, you still know very little about me.

Questions are a primary technique to find out more information. It is a classical Jewish way of teaching. Our question today is who is Jesus? As a starting place, the events of Holy Week define Christ. If they did not happen, then Christianity has no foundation. But if the events of that week actually occurred, then we should listen to Jesus and to the testimonies of the men who wrote the New Testament. "Who is this man Jesus?" As we approach the Easter season, a number of questions that come to mind may help us to begin to answer that question.

Question #1 – Who did the People on Palm Sunday think Jesus was? Matthew 21:10-11 On Palm Sunday Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt which fulfilled prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.* These people recognized the prophecy. Matthew 21:7-9 states, *And the multitudes that went before, and also that followed after, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet of Galilee.*

And now he was riding into town on that colt. I can only imagine that as he rode into Jerusalem there was a question that whispered its way through the crowd by some, "Who is this?" It is also a question that we must answer for ourselves. We cannot ignore the question. Who is this Jesus? Is he God? Is he just a man? The answers we accept to those questions will have eternal consequences. When you are alone, when no one is looking, when it is just you and God, how do you answer this question: Who is this Jesus? Some in the crowds asked the question, but most of them knew the answer or they would not have been standing along the road with palm branches and their cloaks in hand.

The next verse tells us that there were some in the crowd who answered, "This is Jesus, of Nazareth, the prophet of Galilee." A good teacher asks good questions. But this time it was the students asking the questions. And the students knew the answers. The catch was that many there that morning did not like the answer. Because if they found the answer they expected to find, it meant that their lives would need to change.

Brother Steve Smith is very good at this because when he drills down to the real point of the question, it shows how scripturally illiterate I am because I rarely know the specific answer. The people that day did know the answer – they only needed to respond to it.

This began a busy week. After recently raising Lazarus from the grave, He was targeted by the religious sects. Jesus had cleared out the temple from those making money selling sacrifices and exchanging secular money for temple coins. He had a busy teaching schedule with both the disciples and the multitudes being present. He was followed by Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes who were offended by Him and challenged every word.

Matthew 21:10 - 11 says, *And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves; and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.* He claimed the temple as His House. Who was this man?

Now it was Thursday evening. Jesus had gathered His disciples around Him to celebrate the Passover. He had not yet served the bread and wine that began what we call the communion service that is still a part of our church's worship – but He had made the most remarkable statement. A statement that probably frightened many of His closest followers: *Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.* (Matthew 26:22-25, 33) And that prompted the question – "Is it I? Is it I?"

It wasn't just Judas that asked the question. It was all of them. Somewhere, deep inside, each knew that they were capable of such an act. Each of the men whom Jesus had called was a human sinful person capable of betraying their Lord. And they knew it – and so do we. Jesus clarifies the issue, and Judas finally asks, "Is it I?"

The rest of the disciples thought they were off the hook. But a short while later He would tell them, *All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night.* We all remember Peter – but it was not just Peter. They would all turn their backs on Jesus. His three most faithful disciples



could not even stay away to pray for him in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed so intensely there were drops of blood coming from His pores.

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves – Is it I? How do we deny Jesus in our daily lives, our conversations, our conduct?

Question #3 – Who did the authorities say Jesus was? Matthew 27:1-2 states, *When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.*

It is now Friday morning. Jesus has been arrested and put on trial. He was never found to be guilty in an official trial, being dragged from one site to the other. The Roman governor Pilate knew he wasn't guilty but bowed to the pressure of the crowd yelling crucify Him, and Jesus was handed over for execution. He was severely beaten and nailed to the cross. He took on the guilt of the guilty. On the cross was written, where the crimes were posted – Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Just before Christ died, they all heard Him exclaim: *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.* (This is a quote from Psalm 22:) Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies of the Messiah.

It was the darkest day of Jesus earthly life. God was distant, He was alone and in agony.

Jesus was experiencing the loneliness that is common to our lives. Separation – not only from people – but from God as well. Not only was it a troubling time for His believers as Jesus hung on the cross but for God as well.

Jesus for the first-time experienced God's absence. For Jesus it was vividly true. He had always been in the Father's presence either physically or spiritually. But for us this aloneness is different. We know that God is always there. We separate ourselves from Him. But here God had to abandon His Son - so that He could keep His promise to us. God withdrew Himself completely from Jesus. How desperate Jesus must have felt, agreeing to sacrifice Himself according to the Father's wishes and then for the first time in His existence, experiencing a complete separation from His Father. You can tell from the anguish in Jesus' voice that He was completely forsaken.

While I am on the topic of being distant, absent, or separated from God, let me expand on that a moment. Sandra and I have become acquainted with Ralph Sexton, the pastor of Trinity Baptist Church of Ashville, NC and a renowned Bible teacher. We have met Ralph numerous times on the "Singing at Sea" Southern Gospel cruises. He leads trips to Israel every year and then makes an interesting and informative presentation on Israel during one of the afternoons while at sea, as well as teaching Bible classes several mornings.

At one of these morning sessions, I heard Ralph give an explanation with respect to the "bottomless pit". You know in space, up, down, and the four cardinal directions are relative since there is no one frame of reference like there is on earth. So, in heaven, bottomless can be in any direction. But with God as the reference point, down is any direction away from Him and bottomless means there is no end to that movement away from that point of reference. Now I know

that some folks really would rather not discuss or talk about infinity, or forever, or eternity, but it is a reality, and I need to convey Ralph's interpretation, as it really gave me a mental, if not almost visual picture of the concept of the "bottomless pit".

When does consignment to the bottomless pit occur? It occurs at the judgment, at the Great White Throne. So, over here is the great white throne, and over there is the precipice of the bottomless pit. You know, Hell, contrary to popular myths, is not a place where you join up with fellow non-believers and live out eternity with them in the light and warmth of the fires of hell. No, Hell, is your vividly conscious soul being cast out alone and away in total darkness. Not another sound will ever be heard, nothing but utter darkness, absolute solitude and stark aloneness. Each moment, just as if you were falling in a free fall you are moving away from the presence of God, never to see Him or feel His presence, or the presence of the Holy Spirit again. No never. Not ever. A billion years from now you will still be moving away from the presence of GOD. Isn't that what non-believers want, to get God out of their lives? If so, their eternal wish has been granted. You say, how can space be that big? Well, when you come up on that sign that says, "end of space ½ mile," what is on the other side of that line....but, more space and more infinity.

Now, I don't mean to belabor the negative here, but non-believers and scoffers have no concept of what it will be like to be absent from the presence of God for eternity. That is why it is so important to us to become witnesses to them.

Now back to my theme...

Question #4 – In Mark 6:3 we read, *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joseph, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.* Who was this common carpenter, one of the neighborhood guys, to lecture them? They did not recognize His power or His spirit.

So after a solemn sorrowful week, Jesus died a criminal's death. He was quickly buried in a borrowed tomb before the start of the Sabbath. Mary and Salome wanted to give Him a proper burial but as they begin the journey to the tomb on that Sunday morning, the question comes up – "Who will move the stone?"

You know, life often puts tough obstacles in front of us. Life's events get ahead of us. Problems appear for which we do not see a solution. Kids, cars, houses, jobs they all can be huge problems. Problems, big problems, for which there seems to be no answers.

But the answer for Mary and Salome is the same – God is concerned about each and every one of us and our respective problems. He can and will provide answers. That is the lesson that these women had to learn. It is a lesson that I must learn as well. It is easy for me to forget in the midst of the hustle and bustle of life today that God is in control, that is an easy thing for me to say from the pulpit, but now you and I have to believe it and remember it in the midst of all the turmoil and struggles of our lives.

And the proof of all this in the tomb – the empty tomb. Christ has risen! Christ is God. He is who He said He is.



As I come to the end of my message today, we return to the first question we looked – Who is this Jesus? Scripture makes it clear that Jesus was present and active in creation, He is an active part of the Godhead, He was present in the very beginning, He is present now, and He will be present at the end of time. The answer, found in scripture, also must become our answer.

Let me finish where I began, by encouraging you to spend time this week asking yourself and considering – “Who Is This Man – Jesus Christ?” We heard this today:

Carpenter of Nazareth

Son of David

Prophet of Galilee

Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

What is the take-away this morning from our talk you ask?

I heard Brother Rob say some time ago that one morning he got up and came to the sobering realization that he had crossed the tipping point of life. From that point forward, the rest of his life would become a period of intense preparation for the here-after. That while he still had lots of wisdom and knowledge to give and impart, he was no longer pursuing “Castles in the sky,” the dreams, hopes, or plans that are impossible, unrealistic, or have very little chance of succeeding.

This last year I am finding myself in exactly the same situation. I am actually a few months older than Rob, and I too am constantly thinking about the here-after. I too am passing by and giving up on my “Castles in the sky.” I now need to concentrate on knowing the Person I hope to spend all of eternity with - Jesus Christ. Oh, I’ve always believed in Jesus, I’ve never doubted. As many of us have said, those of you who are converts to the church have a real advantage. You had to make a serious decision and commitment prior to your baptism. Many of us who come from long-standing church families, though we have never doubted, in many instances, we have never had to make the same level of commitment to Christ as you converts did. We believed, we always have believed in Him, but the relationship has been more of a corporate or family commitment rather than a personal one. So, here I am just 4 months away from being 80 years old, and getting very serious about building a more personal relationship with Christ. So, you’ll be hearing more from me in the months to come as I try to define Christ and become more personal with him.

Well folks, I didn’t completely define “Who is this man Jesus?” any more than I defined who I was. However, His accomplishments have far greater spiritual implications than any of my physical or temporal accomplishments. But at least now we have a common starting place.

Stay tuned, folks...I’ll have more to say about “Who is this man, Jesus” next time.

The Sacrifice of Christ ***Seventy J. Micah Bates*** ***March 21, 2021***

Good morning. It is a pleasure to almost be with you this morning. It’s been a long time since I have been able to meet with you guys and see you. This congregation, this branch of the Church of Jesus Christ, was always a second home to me. It’s wonderful to be with you again here this morning.

Ron talked about coming up on our celebration and our remembrance of the atonement of Christ and the sacrifice that He made for our sins. What I hope to do this morning is share with you a little bit about that sacrifice and what it has meant to me and how I understand it and what it has done for me and for you. I know that I will not do an adequate job but I pray that the spirit will carry some bit of the things that I have come to understand and love about my Savior to your hearts and that it will cause a change there.

What I’d love to do this morning is take us on a journey of humility. In Mosiah 2:20-23 it talks about a couple of things. *Even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long suffering towards you unworthy creatures. And humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel; And behold, I say unto you, that if ye do this, ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; And ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true.*

So this is what we are going to do this morning. We are going to attempt to remember and retain that remembrance of the greatness of God and our own nothingness. I figured we would start with our own nothingness and then we would go from there to the greatness of God and maybe grow a little bit of our knowledge of who He is and His glory, how He is just and true and merciful.

In the prelude earlier it talked about how without the atonement there would have been no chance for us. Why was it necessary that Christ should die, that someone should die and be resurrected? Why was it necessary that there was an atonement for us?

We start out with an understanding of sin. If we turn to 1st John 3:4 we get a brief definition of what sin is. *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law.* We are going to define a transgression as going against so sin is going against the law. There is a law and sin is NOT doing that. It’s going a different direction than that law. We have a law that is the law of God and when we don’t follow that law, we commit sin.

When we talk about sin, and I am sure this is a review for everyone, it’s important I think that we remember what the law is and what its purpose is and view the



commandments of God the way they should be viewed. So many times we think of the commandments of God and we think of the law of God through our own ideas of what law is and the laws of man. I think if we are doing this it is a problem. I don't know how many young people or old people have a difficulty with this idea of keeping the commandments and viewing God as some sort of like dictator who just makes all these laws so that we can keep them and so that He can lord over us. I am not sure what is going on in their minds or what their thoughts are on that but I want to squash those this morning and remind us of what the laws of God truly are.

When we think of the law of man one of the laws that pops into my mind is speed limits. Have speed limits always existed? The answer is no. Speed limits have not always existed. I don't know if they had speed limits with horse drawn carriages. Maybe there were laws against galloping in towns but before they had a need for speed limits there were none. Then safety became an issue when you started having maybe really fast horses and cars and other vehicles and so we had this need to keep people safe and so we implemented the law of speed limits. Sometimes we think of the laws of God that way as sort of reactionary but when we think of the laws of God which we'll dive into a little bit more today, I want us to think more of the laws of nature. (I don't know if anybody else who has preached over Zoom finds this difficult to not see people's faces and react to them and engage an audience so bear with me. I am sort of going to answer my own questions as I go along or maybe not ask them but just answer them.) When I think of a law of nature, one that most people understand and know about is the law of gravity. The law of gravity states that two objects that have mass are attracted to each other. The more mass they have the more they are attracted to each other and the closer they are the more they are attracted to each other.

Gravity is a law of nature. It is the law by which the universe exists. I guess the question is is gravity a good thing? The answer to that question is yes. Gravity is a good thing. It allows you to walk and run. Without it gasses wouldn't hold to the earth and we wouldn't be able to breathe. In fact, without it our molecules wouldn't stick together and we would not exist at all. So gravity is absolutely a wonderful thing. It is a good thing and there is no question about that.

What happens though when somebody stands on the edge of a cliff and jumps off. At this moment for our said person here is gravity a good thing for them? Definitely not! Gravity is not a good thing for that person. We have an understanding that something that is good for some and good in general for others in certain circumstances can be bad. When we look at sin and when we go back to our little man jumping off the cliff, is there somebody at the bottom of that cliff waiting there to punish our person when he gets to the bottom? No, there's not. He suffers the consequences because they are the consequences of nature. There is a law that is good but when he disobeys that law and doesn't work within the confines of that law, bad things happen to him.

We're going to go now to the gospel of John 3:16. This is probably one of the most famous scriptures of all the scriptures. *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. Now this is where it gets exciting. John 3:16 is really exciting but when the next verses explain what that means I think that is super exciting. *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.* (John 3:17-19)

The light, which we'll talk about later, we are going to refer to as God, the way things are, the truth, the law. The law comes to people and it is presented to them because we exist. Gravity is a law. It is 100% a law of God, no questions. It is a law of God. When we disobey that law it says here specifically that God sent not His Son into the world to condemn us. A little plug here. We were talking about forgiveness this morning. If Christ Himself does not condemn mankind what right do we have to condemn each other?

I was sitting on a bridge at the Odessa Hills Campgrounds with a young lady sitting next to me who was crying. I asked her what was going on and she proceeded to tell me this story about her life. She had been through a great deal. She wondered, because of the interactions she had with her parents, family members, and friends, if she was even loved. When she told me this story of her life and the things that had gone on, I thought how can she do anything else but question whether or not she was loved. It was a very sad situation. I remember sitting there and thinking I have nothing that I can possibly tell this young lady that could change the years and the pain and all of the things that have gone on. I have nothing for her basically was the conclusion I came to. I said a little prayer and through the Lord's insight I began to talk to her about sin and what sin does and how though sin hurts us, the one that sin hurts the most is the one that is committing that sin. I am really abbreviating this story otherwise it would take a long time. But the one that sin hurts the most is the one that commits the sin. She had a lot of anger and frustration and pain associated with her interactions with her family but in that moment we were able to look and see that the things that her family was doing were causing them more pain than it could ever cause her. That we don't need to retaliate. We don't need to return to them a spirit of pain and injustice and sadness because that's where they already are. The only way to end that cycle is to return to them the spirit of love and peace and joy. It says in the scriptures that they should know the truth and the truth shall make them free. When we understand the truth about sin we realize that we are the ones that condemn ourselves not God. God has provided this law for us to exist, for us to survive, for us to have joy and when we contradict that law, when we choose to do things our own way and desire that it be our own way instead of the way that God has made it, then we condemn ourselves. We bring ourselves into a place where we can no longer have joy.



This has come into use a great deal in my life. I work as a pharmacist and when people come to the pharmacy they come to you in pretty much their worst condition. They're sick. They're tired. They've been at doctors. They've been pushed here and there and it's just not a great place and you are like their final step. Possibly something went wrong with their medications and they had to pass through a hundred people to get to the pharmacy and get the medications into their hands. They're tired, frustrated and angry. Pharmacy eats up a lot of people. Generally pharmacy is filled with quite a few anxious technicians and pharmacists because they have to deal with people all day long that are in that situation.

When you put yourselves in their shoes, you then have an opportunity to help them leave that place in a better condition than when they came. Now it's their choice whether or not they do that but you have the opportunity to be a servant at that point, to lay yourself down for them. Arthur Oakman said whenever a brother is overcome in a fault against us what do we do? We return to them that same spirit which they brought to us but Christ in Himself took those things and bore them within Himself and buried them in there and they died and He returns to us love.

There is a phrase we use in society so often: that makes me angry. We this morning and from this point on can no longer use that phrase legitimately. Understand this - nothing in this world can make you angry. Freedom comes through Jesus Christ. We as a nation value freedom so much but we think of freedom as the ability to do whatever we want without necessarily even thinking of the consequences. But Christ showed us that freedom is the ability to have the world do whatever it wants to you and not have it change you, to not be reacting to the world but to be acting upon the world for righteousness. So we have sin and it is a transgression of the law of God, a law that was created for our joy, for our enjoyment, for our everything. I guess joy kind of encapsulates everything that is good that we experience. This law was created for us but there's a problem. As we talked about sin is a transgression of that law and we learned that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

I am going to talk for a moment about the nature of sin. I don't know about you but sometimes I take my sin and in the process of repenting I put that sin in a box but that sin, no matter what is completely and utterly destructive. If I was there in person I would ask the question what is murder and we would come up with all kinds of different answers including the killing of an innocent and eventually we would get steered towards murder is killing for personal gain, to get something that I want. I would ask. Is that bad? And everybody would probably say yes, murder is bad, absolutely. Then I would ask why? And we would eventually come to an understanding that murder is bad because it takes away somebody else's ability to choose. It takes away their opportunity to express the agency that God has given them for their will to be done. It is the desire that somebody else should not exist because you think that their existence makes your world worse.

Then the question is: what is a lie? A lie is telling something that is not true obviously. And the question would be why do people lie? People lie to get gain because they

think that telling somebody something that is not true will get them what they want. Why is it bad? Because you are seeking to take away the agency of that person. You are seeking to take away their ability to make a choice based on the truth. You are seeking to take away the thing that makes them a human being, the thing that God gave them that gives them the opportunity to be a son or daughter of Christ, their agency. You are seeking to take that thing.

I make this comparison because I don't know if anybody else has seen kind of an equal sign there between the murder and the lie. Both of them are seeking to take away the agency of somebody else, the ability for them to choose for themselves. The reason I do this is so that we do not sugarcoat our sins, so that we recognize as it was written in Mosiah our own nothingness. That all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That we this morning are doing no packaging of our sin. We are holding it and recognizing it and we are owning it for what it is.

Let's turn to James the second chapter just to sort of sum of what we've been talking about. Starting in verse 8, *If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well; But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. So if we are a respecter of persons we commit sin and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall, save in one point, keep the whole law, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.* (8-12)

So here we are, mankind. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We recognize what our sin is and what it does. We learned that the consequence of sin or the wages of sin is death. Just like the guy jumping off the cliff at the end he does not survive. In the end we will not survive but the question is if the consequence of sin is death and all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, why aren't we dead? Everybody here that I am talking to is not dead. The first time we committed sin should we not have suffered the consequences of that sin? Should we not have died? The answer is yes according to the law, absolutely. We can't survive that fall from that cliff but this is where we come to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and what it does for us.

On the cross as He is about to die, Jesus says a phrase and He says it and there's a little quotation. He says speaking of the Roman centurion and the soldiers there but I believe that this applies to each and every individual. He says, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' Who has received forgiveness of sins? People are raising their hands. So my question is also who has not received a forgiveness of their sins? Who has sinned? Everybody. Does everybody die the first time that they commit sin? No. Is it possible that everyone on this earth has received some portion of forgiveness for their sins? This is a beautiful thing. 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' Christ offers forgiveness to all but that forgiveness is conditional. It is conditional upon us not understanding what it is that we are doing to ourselves and to others.



Now we sometimes use these words interchangeably and this is sort of semantics but for me I like to kind of draw a line. This is not necessarily what you have to do but I like to draw a line between forgiveness and repentance. Forgiveness often, and it's used both ways in scripture so don't quote me on this, but forgiveness the way I look at it, is something that is done to me or done on my behalf. God forgives me so I don't suffer the consequences of my sin immediately but then He offers me a gift and that gift is the opportunity to no longer be in my sin. It says in Matthew the 2nd chapter that they should call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins. Now forgiveness doesn't necessarily bring you out of that place that you are in but repentance does, a remission of your sins.

We talked earlier about what the sacrifice of Jesus does. It takes you from a place where you are in sin to a place where you are out of sin and free from it. I want us to understand that repentance is a gift from God. It is not something that we can do on our own. It is not something that we have the opportunity to do without God, without the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is a gift that we are given. Arthur Oakman put it this way. He said the gospel of Jesus Christ is not the gospel of Jesus Christ because it offers forgiveness to those that repent. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ because it offers repentance to those that have sinned. It gives us the opportunity to come out of our sins which without the gospel, without the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, would not be possible. That change would not be possible.

We come to this point where we recognize that we have sinned. We recognize that it is destructive to us. It causes our death and it causes the death of all mankind. We also recognize that we have received a forgiveness of our sin to a certain extent because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ but the question is why? Why did He have to die? Why did an individual, a man by His own claim, also the Son of God, but a man by His own claim. Why did His death do anything for me? He was crucified. Many were crucified. Billions of people have died throughout the course of humanity. Why did His death do something for me? Why did His death allow me to change from my simple state contradicting the laws of nature and the laws of the universe to a place where I can be in concert with them? We are going to go into that in just a little bit.

We are talking about why. We know the reason why He had to die because we are sinful and we were going to die because of it. Now we are going to talk about how that works and this, for me, is one of the most incredible things. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ and it's fantastic. I am so glad that I live in a time where I have this modern revelation and have the opportunity to look at these things.

We are going to go to the Doctrine and Covenants Section 85 and this is going to be a very abbreviated understanding of this concept. We're going to talk a little bit about what His death and resurrection did for us. We are going to 85:2a-3b. *This Comforter is the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom;* (When we talk about the comforter we're talking about the Spirit of God.) *which glory is that of the church of the Firstborn, even of God, the holiest of all, through Jesus Christ, his Son;* (This is talking about who Jesus is.) he that

ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth, which truth shineth. This is the light of Christ. As also he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. As also he is in the moon, and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made. As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made. And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand. And the light which now shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God, to fill the immensity of space. The light which is in all things; which giveth life to all things; which is the law by which all things are governed; even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things.

You attend church regularly with Ron Smith. I don't know if you have ever had the opportunity to sit down and talk with him about things like physics and light but suffice it to say we have a problem as human beings when we look at spiritual things. We have a tendency to over spiritualize. We think of things as all of these metaphors but I am convinced 100% that this is not a metaphor. This is straight. In fact, when Christ tells us it's a metaphor, He always tells us that that's what He's talking about.

Now we think of comprehending as understanding but in this sense I think it's more than that. To be able to understand something truly and totally you have to bring it within yourself. We do this all the time. When we communicate with each other what we do is we model the other person into our minds to build them inside our minds. When they say something like "I really like spaghetti" we build this picture of who they are in our minds, a picture of somebody that really likes spaghetti. This is how we communicate with each other by modeling each other in our own minds. We take a piece of them and make it a part of us.

So He comprehendeth all things. He took all things and made them His that He might be in and through all things, the light of truth which light shineth. This is the light of Christ. If you didn't know and we could go into great detail on this but all things are made up of light. In their most basic form light is what makes up this universe. It says that light is truth. What is truth? My best definition for truth is things the way they are, the way they have been and the way they will be. It's truth. It's just reality. It says that Christ is the light. He is reality. As also He is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. And He goes through all of those things and then in 3 it says, *And the light which now shineth, which giveth you light,* (not a metaphor). We're talking about the lightbulb. We're talking about the way that you see the world around you. We're talking about the sun that allows you to interact with the world. We're talking about the light that exists inside of yourselves, inside of the people that are in the room with you, the chairs that you are sitting on, that give all things existence is through Him who enlightened your eyes which is the same light which quickeneth your understanding. It's the ability for us to understand the universe around us which



light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space.

Let's go to Colossians really quick. *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by him were all things created, (so by Christ all things were created) that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him; And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* (Colossians 1:15-17)

Since Mike has a mike and I can hear him I am going to ask Mike questions. Mike, what would you define your body as? Glorious. Oh, that's fantastic. It is absolutely, 100%. A physical representation of me. What makes your body your's and not somebody else's? I control it with my mind. You control it with your mind. That is absolutely fantastic. You are right on top of things. This is actually really cool. Your mind is incredible.

Everyone has cell phones, right? Has anybody every lost their cell phone? Has anybody every felt that deep panic inside of you when you lost your cell phone? Did you know that when you spend enough time using an object your mind integrates that object and considers it part of yourself? People that lose their cell phone that use them readily for business, work and communication feel like they have lost an integral part of their life. I'm not going to equate it 100% because obviously it's not the same as losing a limb but they experience very similar things when they lose that opportunity to use that device, like physically, mentally they experience very similar things to when somebody loses a limb.

Does everybody remember the first time they drove a car? When you first start driving a car you think all right it's time to push on the gas. It's time to push on the brake. I need to turn the wheel and turn the blinker on. A few years in (some of you have been driving for decades now) do you do that anymore? Do you think about pushing on the gas? Do you think about pushing on the brake? No. In fact, your mind takes that car and makes it part of yourself. It feels like it's an extension of yourself.

We're going to define our bodies as Mike did as the things that we have direct control over, that no one else has that direct control over. Obviously, somebody can force you to do something if they are stronger than you but the thing that you have direct control over we're going to consider our bodies. Now, we're going to define something. We're going to define the body of Christ. In Matthew 24 we learn that Christ has all power over all things. Now when we say all things that is minus no things. That is everything in the universe. We learned in Doctrine and Covenants 85 just now that He was put above all things, below all things that He might subdue all things to Himself. We learned in Colossians that by Him all things consist. If Christ has power over all things and control over all things is there anything that is not part of His body? No, absolutely not! There's nothing.

The word Elohim as used by the Hebrews literally means the Lord of Hosts of all things, of all spirits. Steve said he was going to talk about the Spirit being in and through all things that the rocks would cry out. We read in the scriptures about the earth crying out for justice. If people

didn't worship God than the rocks themselves would cry out. All things are both spiritual and physical. We read that in Section 90 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Spirit and element are inseparably connected and the one who has control over all those things is the one by which all things consist.

We have this thing where Mike has a body and he is in control of it but the question is, is Mike part of all things? Yes, Mike is part of all things. He is a subset of that all things. So Mike does exist. Does anyone else see the problem here? So Mike has a body that he has control over but that body also belongs to somebody else. If I had the ability to draw I would draw a person here in the middle and I would put Mike's name here and Jesus' name would be over her. So we have a problem with dual ownership. Mike absolutely has control of his body but it also belongs to somebody else, the one who created it, the one that made it, the one that allows it to be. We talked about sin and how sin causes death. Can two people do two different things with the same object at the same time? The answer is no so if Mike wants to dance and Jesus wants to sit, they can't do both of them at the same time.

Mike, what is death? Which death? What is death in general? Where the body ceases to be animated. So you no longer have control over your body. Death is what happens when our body, the thing that is us, that we are able to interact with the world in, is no longer under our control. Has anyone ever felt claustrophobic before? I remember this one time I was at camp and I somehow got into an inner tube with another individual and we were both in this not very big inner tube in the center of it and it got flipped over. My head was underwater. We were both stuck. We had no way to get ourselves flipped back over and it was terrifying. There was nothing I wanted more in that moment than not to be there and yet I couldn't do anything about it. I had a will that desired to not be underwater and yet there was no power within myself to do anything about it. Thankfully somebody came and saved us by flipping the inner tube over.

When we experience that - the taking away of our ability to act, I am going to define as death. The taking away of our ability to enact our will, the things that we desire, the things that we want on the world around us and on ourselves. That is what death is, whether spiritual or physical. If we have this situation where we have this body and we have this will of Mike that desires to do things with this body and yet we have this will of Christ that desires things to be done in this body that is His, both of them cannot do it at the same time so what has to happen? Somebody has to die. Somebody has to die and though we deserve it and though we have been selfish and have had murder in our hearts, Jesus said I will be the one that dies. I will let you continue in your sin until you can come to a point where you understand what it is that you have done and understand that there is a better way, until you come to a point where we can both live in this body, where our wills are one, where you will not ask anything of the Father that is not righteous. We think of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ sometimes as something that happened 2000 years ago on a cross but I want us to understand that it is something that happens every single day when we choose our own will above the will of the Father. He lays down Himself over and over again. We learn in Hebrews 6:3-6, *And we will go on*



unto perfection if God permit. For he hath made it impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to be renewed again unto repentance; seeing they crucify unto themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

Every moment of every day we live in a world that is based off of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We live in a world based off the law of the death of God, even these physical bodies. It says in Romans 14:17, *For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* When we look at the world and these bodies, what is it that sustains us? Food, sleep, exercise. When we consume things something has to die for us to live. We eat vegetables and meat and all those things but something had to give up its life so that we could live. The sun itself is giving up its life. It's burning out moment by moment to sustain life on this earth. Nothing lives except by the power of the sun, the solar sun giving it life. The law of this universe is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ laying His life down moment by moment so that we, as terrible as it sounds, have the opportunity to continue in our sin until we come to a point where we can understand. We can understand that God offers us repentance. That He did not just die. Eventually he will take back possession of that which is His and it will either be by willingness of the participant or it will be by force. There will be a death where the desires of that individual are contradictory to the desires of the Almighty God of the Universe.

Understand that when we sin it is the desire for something to be other than the way that it is. Has anybody ever tried to push a house over? No people don't do that. Why not? Because it's silly. No one can do that. Nobody is that strong. They understand that there is a law that says that this thing is too big for me to push over. When we sin we're basically trying to push the universe into a different direction that it cannot go. We thought pushing our house was silly. It is futile and it will get you nowhere and in the end when He regains control of all that which is His and takes it unto Himself for those that have wasted away their time, their opportunity for repentance and have chosen in the end to love darkness rather than light, they will be separated from their ability to act out those things that they desire. For them that will be spiritual death. Eternally wanting something that cannot be. Yet for those that repent there is joy, there is peace, there is love, there is freedom for the world to do whatever it will and not be changed by it, to have Jesus Christ living inside of us. This is the beauty of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as I understand it.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to share with you this morning. I pray that the Lord goes with you and that you continue in that remembrance of who we are and who He is. That we will always be found with a remission of our sins. God bless.

What Are You Going to do About It?

Elder Joshua Pedersen

May 30, 2021

When I am preparing to speak, the Lord will sometimes present a very clear topic that should be discussed and other times He likes, I suppose, to make me actually have to work for it and teaches me some lessons along the way.

I would like to start out of the book of Mark 4 starting in verse 29. *And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him, even as he was, in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat over into the ship; and he was in the hinder part of the ship asleep on a pillow; and they awoke him, and said unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace; be still; and the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? (29-33)*

Hopefully, we have all heard that story, that passage. That was one that was always told to me in Sunday school. As a kid I always thought it was incredible that Jesus was able to sleep peacefully during a storm that was such a great tempest that they thought they were going to die and He is soundly asleep in the bottom part of the boat as if nothing were happening.

The thing that stood out to me in this story is that I always focused on when Jesus calmed the sea. That was a very strong miracle. There was tempest and He just tells it to be calm and suddenly it is calm. I hadn't been on the ocean until when Michael mentioned we were in Tahiti. We were on a barge going across to another island. It was relatively calm water and I still felt sick at just the jostling of this giant barge taking us from one island to another. I can't imagine being in a boat that is absolutely being rocked by waves, a tempest, where you are absolutely afraid that you are going to die.

The part that stands out to me now isn't the miracle of the calming of the seas. It's what Jesus says to His disciples afterwards. He says, *Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?* Think about that situation. You are very near death and scared. You know that there is one person on that boat who you feel very strongly could probably do something about it but He's kind of mad that you asked Him or that you were afraid maybe. They didn't stop to think while we trust Jesus to have these powers to do things, they might not have fully understood that. If you read verse 33 I think they didn't fully understand who He was or what He was capable of at the time.

They didn't trust and so He says, *How is it that ye have no faith?* He didn't even say a little faith. He said no faith. There's a lot of figurative or literal storms that we go through. As people who bear the name of Christ or who should be bearing the countenance of Christ, I think we are called to a much stronger sense of accountability when it comes to this kind of topic. When we are in these storms,



both literal and physical, we're in these dangerous situations. What are our first thoughts? Are they fear for our life which is frankly a very natural reaction or is it trust? Is it faith? There's nothing wrong with being afraid, absolutely not but they were upset at Jesus. They weren't just saying, 'Hey wake up and stop this.' They said, 'Do you not even care that we're dying or that we're going to die?' As someone who doesn't really like being woken up when I am in a deep sleep I relate maybe to a little bit of His frustration. He's probably thinking, 'Guys, do you think I am going to let this happen? You couldn't let me get those last 5 minutes of sleep?'

Jazmyn has this thing where if I plan to be up like 5 minutes past when I should have been up, she is going to come and wake me up at the time I should have been awake because she thinks I slept in. I am always tired and I didn't tell her that I wanted these extra 5 minutes but now I don't get them. Obviously, I don't have the same reaction that Christ did in this moment but I understand. I empathize with the human side of Jesus on that.

When we are going through all these storms are we so afraid that we're mad at the Lord? Are we saying, 'Lord, why have you placed me in this situation?' Or, are we trusting. I think there are a lot of people who, and they might even have a basis for it, think any time they go through something it's a direct punishment for something they've done. I do believe that there's a very firm accountability for our actions and sometimes it feels like it's an outside source but storms are going to come regardless of whether we're following the Lord the way we should, whether we've answered His call or not. As midwesterners we are pretty familiar with storms, with tornadoes and if a tornado hits your house I don't think it's a direct sign that you've messed up and the Lord is punishing you by taking your house. I think the tornado just happened to go through there.

It's what we do in those moments. It's how we feel inside our hearts and our minds and our souls that makes the difference. Because if we're not following the Lord and we're not trusting in the Lord, we're sitting there broken and confused and struggling thinking why did this bad thing happen that's shaken me to the core? But if we're trusting in the Lord, if we have fully given control to Him, we trust that the Lord might not have sent that tornado to take out my house on purpose because I did something bad but it happened and I trust the Lord that somehow that is going to work together for my good. I find myself quoting Romans 8:28 to myself a lot and I suppose to whoever will listen.

Aquila was nice enough to test drive a truck for me in Columbia that I really liked. He was hesitant because it is a 30-year old truck and he didn't want to give the stamp of approval. You don't really want to tell your brother-in-law, 'Hey, come on out two hours away. I've got a great deal for you and then something bad happens.'

Well, it turned out something bad did happen. On the way to Columbia I was talking to my Dad. I was belaboring him with how important Romans 8:28 has become to me and how important it is to trust the Lord that regardless of why or what's happening it's going to work together for my good. That's a very strong promise that we've been given.

On the way back we were about 5 miles east of Odessa, MO and the truck breaks down. I lose all power

while I am going 70 miles per hour. Thankfully I was able to get over on the side of the road but it had been a long day and I was tired and frustrated. On top of all these weird things suddenly I had an asthma attack without an inhaler. I asked, 'Lord, what else have you got for me today?' My Dad said, 'Well, you have spent the last 3 hours lecturing me about trusting the Lord and how all these things are going to work together for your good. Where's that same energy now?' I immediately had to check myself because that is something that is so important for me. Even when I was in the midst of these minor and I mean very minor things, I was able to get the truck over to the side of the road. I wished it could have been closer to the exit because Jazmyn works in Odessa and they usually will let us dump our stuff there to get towed later. Instead we had to get it towed to her work and then towed from her work to a mechanic, but it turned out to be a really easy fix. The guy I bought it from just messed something up when he was working on it. An actual shop fixed it and it has run great ever since. But I was so worried because I was thinking Jazmyn didn't really want me to buy this truck and now I have this truck that she thought was a junker and now it's confirmed, but I really liked it. She is never going to want to get into it now because it's broken down on its maiden voyage home. There were all these thoughts going through my mind and suddenly my chest is getting tight. My Dad doesn't really know anything about asthma other than well now Josh can't breathe so we were all just having these weird little moments. Then out of nowhere my back started hurting. All these little tiny things that don't really matter were suddenly mattering a lot. It took someone around me saying, 'Josh, you spent a lot of time talking about this promise and now it's time to actually live it.'

In moments like this that actually matter, that aren't me complaining because a few things didn't go my way in a row, which is upsetting but in the grand scheme of things my life wasn't on the line, our house hadn't been swept away. It was a relatively cheap vehicle that acted like a relatively cheap vehicle on the highway. I didn't get hit when I suddenly lost all power. I was able to go from the left lane onto the shoulder and to be honest, I didn't even look once behind me to see if there was someone there. I was just thinking, 'This truck is going down and I have to get over there quick.' I was blessed that there happened to not be anyone there and the Lord was looking out for me there too.

Once I was able to pull myself out of where I was mentally and trust the Lord again, there were so many blessings in that experience. That could have been Jazmyn and me having a truck full of camping gear headed down to southern Missouri and it breaks down and there's no one following me in a car to pick me up and drive me around to different auto parts stores and we're stranded on the side of the road. There could have been so many things that were worse but I was so focused on the small things that happened.

In my life those kinds of things prepare me for when the big things happen. We haven't had any big things and so I am always in the back of my mind saying one of those quick prayers, 'Well, Lord, I know I just said that in front of people but feel free not to test me on that one.' But where is our heart and mind? Do we fully, actually believe what we say



we believe? I talked about that scripture so much I could have tattooed that reference across my forehead. If you met me for five minutes I was talking about Romans 8:28. I quoted it verbatim all the time anytime any one asked me anything. That scripture was at the front of my mind all times and the moment where I could put it into practice I was boo-hooing on the side of the highway.

We can believe all these things. We can believe that Jesus is everything that we believe He is and when we are in the boat with Him and it's rocking, we still might find ourselves saying, 'Lord, do you not even care that I am dying over here? Do you not even care that all these bad things are happening to me?' I have a feeling that He would respond the same way. Where is your faith? How do you not have any faith after everything you've seen. You know this isn't like an introductory section. Jesus had done some things before this. They didn't just meet Him. They had seen the miracles and they still were floored, 'I can't believe He just did that.' They still didn't know who they were with.

The challenge in my own life is making my beliefs reality. Any time I am frustrated about something and I catch myself complaining, I think 'Well what are you going to do about it? Are you just going to kind of complain and then get sad about it and then every time it comes up just feel sad or angry and you didn't do anything at all about it.' I was having a lot of trouble at work. It was so bad that had I not been married to Jazmyn and had a mortgage I probably would have just quit and not done anything about the problem. I had a feeling that when Jazmyn got home and saw that my work laptop wasn't there and I told her I quit we would have an unfortunate conversation. I don't think she would be as well pleased or feel as good about it as I would have.

Instead I decided that I should talk to my bosses and tell them what I was upset about and what I thought was wrong. Weirdly enough everything corrected the way it needed to be but it was something that I didn't want to do because it took effort. I had to have what potentially could have been a really uncomfortable conversation with someone who controls my career and I really didn't want to do that. But it was either that or spend every day after the shift complaining to Jazmyn for 3 hours about how much I disliked my job.

I assume there are a lot more layers to you guys than just what you do for your occupation. What are the things that you find yourself complaining about? Oftentimes I find myself really discouraged by the lack of movement in the people who claim Christ. That's not just Restorationists. That's all of us, every single person who feels connected to the risen Savior in one way or another. It's always disappointing to me when we don't do anything about it or when you see churches closing their doors during hurricanes and not allowing people in. You see all these things that are discouraging but what are you going to do that's different?

For awhile last year I was feeling that way about homeless people. We were working with a lot of homeless people in Independence. We were constantly feeling discouraged because it just felt like nothing was being done and nothing was going on. The challenge was issued to us to do something about it. We didn't start a nonprofit or we didn't go out and start up a soup kitchen but every time we

went out to do something we would make sure that we did some form of tangible ministry. When we went out on missionary trips to San Diego we handed out water to homeless people. We did little things like that were actually movement.

When we were in San Diego we bought a hundred bottles of water and had those passed out within 15 minutes so we had to go buy more. But what was really shocking was when we approached the people to hand them water they wouldn't even look up at us. They were so down trodden that they just assumed that we were just pausing looking at something else. We had to actually get their attention and then they would look up. They were so touched at something as simple as a cool bottle of water in a normal day. That, once again, reinforced 'what are we doing about it?' Because that was the bare minimum and we didn't do much after that. As far as helping people that was almost the least you could do literally. It cost us 30 cents a bottle. We didn't do much but it meant so much to those people that someone cared enough to give them water.

If you are frustrated about that or if you find yourself complaining about what's being said from the pulpit, talk to the guy saying it. That one's not super comfortable but Jazmyn actually did that at our branch. There was something said from the pulpit that wasn't correct. It was correct but it wasn't the right way to do it and it offended a lot of people unnecessarily. At the end of the service Jazmyn had an email typed up ready to send to the pastor. She held off for a little bit but eventually sent it. It was a really neat practice in actually doing what we are supposed to be doing because our pastor received it, took it and put it up against the scriptures and said, 'You know what? You're right. We shouldn't have said that from the pulpit. I am going to go talk to the guy.' He talked to the guy and then our pastor went and talked to each of the people that were offended in the branch and told them what he did and why. Moving forward they are going to try to not do that anymore.

Had Jazmyn not felt the need to bring that up that wouldn't have happened. Those kinds of things are the things that help a branch grow stronger together because a lot of people could have just left and said, 'Well, I didn't like hearing that and I'm going.' Instead a difficult, uncomfortable thing was done and things got better.

Throughout scripture we see people doing really uncomfortable things. Primarily, you think about Christ's life. I don't imagine anything He did really being intensely comfortable. Forty days without food isn't necessarily comfortable or ideal in my mind. The crucifixion was rather uncomfortable if I had to guess. But He did it. He cared so much about what He was doing that He fulfilled it. At one point He said, 'Hey, Father, if you could I really don't feel like doing this. Would you take this cup from me?' He didn't say it in those exact words but I imagine if I were sitting there I would say, 'Hey, have you got any backup options. I would really be Ok not doing this today.' But the next part that He said is what's important. He said, 'Nevertheless, not my will but thy will be done.' He submitted to the Father and He did something horrendously uncomfortable. Because of that we're assembled in this room today.



In your life I imagine there's a litany of things that you have been kicking down the road or if you are anything like me, I guess I should say, there's a lot of things you have been kicking down the road because you don't want to deal with them. These can range from really small things like a minor conversation to your boss that really didn't take much, an email to a pastor that needed to be said, something even in your marriage that is a really tiny thing that you might want to bring up that's causing some contention in your mind. You don't want to deal with this uncomfortable thing but it needs to be done because we are called to be together. That's a very important thing throughout scripture where the Saints are supposed to be together. It says when two or three are gathered so that's a relatively small circle. If that's where you are comfortable you still have to get along with at least one other person and that's not always easy.

Any one who has had a roommate or a spouse understands you can be frustrated about how the toilet paper roll is put back on the stand or whether butter goes inside the fridge or out. Aquila and I were talking that some people actually put opened ketchup in the cupboard. I don't know why you would do that frankly but that is a possible source of contention. What's very important to me is our relationships with each other. Christ was pretty clear when He said 'If you hate those you can see how can you ever love God who you cannot see.' If we can't get along with each other how are we ever going to fully believe what we believe because we are made in His image. If we hate each other over really minor things, or even if we just dislike each other, why? We have to say something. We have to at least try. This might be something you disagree with but there are, in my opinion, a lot of reasons we can tell ourselves why we don't want to go through these uncomfortable situations. But as the church is set up there's literally a priesthood office that is set up to help you facilitate this if you can't do it yourself. That's how important it is to the Lord.

Our relationships with each other correlate, in my opinion, with your relationship with the Lord because it's easy to start getting those angry thoughts toward your family and those around you. I've noticed that when I am like that my prayers change. That I am not as diligent. I am not as fervent. I am not as hopeful because I am so wrapped up in what these people are doing and why and how frustrating it is. But when you can get through that additional push, it's amazing what kind of an example and witness you can set.

I'd like to share something that happened to me recently. I don't want it to come across as I've done something neat as much it's definitely God because if you talked to me about one of these situations three years ago I would have been absolutely livid. Because Jazmyn and I attend Saints Haven branch I was told I wasn't allowed to staff a camp since we send delegates to the JCRB Conferences. I was already invited to the camp and was getting ready to go and then someone found out about it and pulled the plug. I was told that I am no longer allowed to go. When that happened several years ago it was really frustrating to me and I had a full blown grudge against people for that because I thought it was so ridiculous that they would do that. I couldn't believe that they would do that over something so silly as where we attend church.

When it happened recently it really didn't even phase me. In fact, it wound up helping me because I was able to use that as an excuse to get out of a couple of other things. I was able to free up my calendar for other things. It wound up working out really well for me personally but I was still disappointed because I really wanted to go to that camp. Instead what it did was everyone who I talked to about it, the directors included, said it was wrong and they were really upset that it happened and were going to see that it didn't happen again. The people who talked to me about that five or six years ago didn't even consider anyone who has any conference affiliation whatsoever to basically be Christian. I wondered how far they would take it and now they are going to bat for me. They were advocating for me and mad that it didn't go their way and were considering what actions they were going to take.

When I say that it's really minor for me not to go to a camp, I can't overemphasize that enough. It's like that is once again one of the least things I cannot do. I didn't have to use a week of my PTO to do something at camp. I'm disappointed because I was really excited to go to a junior high camp. I feel like we have under serviced our junior high-age kids. They usually are like hybrid elementary school kids most of the time at camps and they get this same watered down froufrou gospel instead of what they would get at the senior high camp and I was really excited about being able to go and do that so I don't mean to be flippant about me not getting to go to the camp.

In the grand scheme of our salvation these little things that feel big to us in the moment are they keeping us from something better, something grander and not just us but our communities and our society? There is an impact that occurs when someone stands for the truth. It makes everyone else around them uncomfortable most of the time. I think all of us could agree we are not really in a very truthful society as a whole. There are microcosms I am sure, maybe Lamoni or Mount Ayr are more truth-centered areas compared to others but as a broad global society your word is not necessarily always your bond. That's a pretty unfortunate thing if you are trying to trust somebody but when you are standing up for what's true, what's real and what you know beyond a shadow of a doubt to be important, it almost inevitably makes people uncomfortable.

I tend to go to San Diego a couple of times a year with Tyler Ramirez. This trip was really incredible. We had a lot of strong spiritual blessings and there were baptisms and a marriage and all kinds of things that weren't planned and just kind of happened. We showed up to a Buddhist guy's house and he was baptized that night, married his fiancé and they have been doing well ever since. In fact, he's been bringing more people to Christ ever since and he hasn't even been baptized for a year.

The Lord brought to my mind one of Doug Smith's testimonies about 'what are you going to do with the stuff I've already given you.' Doug wanted the gift of tongues at a camp or retreat and the Lord challenged him to share the testimonies of the miracles he has already been given to everybody. In his mind he was thinking well I am a doctor and I don't want people to think I am a crazy doctor so he



was a little hesitant but by the end of the retreat he decided all right he was going for it.

So he went all out and shared everything to everybody every time he got the chance. A little while later he experienced the gift of tongues while on a trip to Africa because his translator had been left off and he was left to speak in French and he didn't know French very well. He ended up having a full blown conversation that ended up in the conversion of Saints.

So what are we doing with the things we've been given? I started sharing it with my coworkers and you could have heard a pin drop. I told them that we had had some baptisms and a physical healing. We had all of these things and when I got done with the list, my coworkers thought that was pretty crazy and wished I wouldn't have said that. Then they spent the rest of the week kind of making fun of me. Anytime I mentioned I was tired my boss would say something along the lines of 'Well, you must be tired from all those miracles you had last week.' Stuff like that kept happening and it was clear that that was not something they were comfortable with. If you have met my Dad our family is kind of built to lean into that so I did inadvertently not turn it down but wound up turning it up a little more and now that's just our new normal with my coworkers. We've all coalesced where we're working together well again.

There's this challenge and constant battle in my mind of who I am serving because it's easy for us to wear multiple hats. It really is. Even within the broad, really broad "Restoration" there's people who are really dishonest business people, very unscrupulous. They have no problem lying to your face in business but then they will come to church and are genuinely all about it but it's because they are wearing two different hats. I talked to this one guy one time and he said that his beliefs and his occupation were like oil and water. They existed together in the same container but they were very clearly separated. I think that's completely incorrect. I don't think we get to be part-time followers of Christ. The Apostles just left. They just left what they were doing and followed Him. I know we don't have a physical Christ to follow around the nation but I think we could be having, at the bare minimum, our beliefs funnel into everything else we do. That's a pretty easy segway in my mind if you are looking for ways to try.

When I first started waiting tables I actually lied all the time because I wanted to make sure that I got my tip. I was getting paid \$3.00 per hour and I was afraid if I told them that I forgot to put in their order they would not give me a tip. But if I told them the kitchen messed it up, my tip was saved. That's also a pro tip for you. If it's been 15 minutes and suddenly the kitchen dropped it, the waiter just forgot to put your order in.

I did that for a while and then someone said, 'I thought you were a follower of Christ and you are like bold face lying to these people.' So I stopped and I was really nervous about it because it was definitely incorrect. I was raised better than that but I was still doing it because that's what everybody around me was doing. I thought if they were doing it I might as well try it too. The craziest thing is when I was honest with people about not putting their order in sometimes they would double my tip because they would say

I was really busy tonight. That's once again a very, very minor example of what can happen when you are actually doing what you are supposed to be doing. I am not close to having everything nailed down but the Lord builds on these really small moments for me because I am kind of pigheaded. It takes me a really long time to get to the actual thing the Lord wants me to learn so He builds on these little minor things.

I have some friends who are dual citizens. They were born in another country and came to the US as kids so they hold citizenship in both nations. What I have noticed is that they are really just American. They go back to where they were from once every five years but the majority of their time is spent here. Here they speak English 90% of their life. Everything that they do is American. They hold that citizenship to the country they were born into but for all intents and purposes they are US Citizens.

We have a similar struggle in our lives because we are called to be citizens of the kingdom. We're citizens of the United States and that's great and fantastic actually. I would definitely not want to be born in any other country than where we are and specifically in the midwest. Any time I am on the coast it feels like I am in another country so I am always happy to be back but which citizenship are we giving priority to? There are things in American society that are considered acceptable such as lying on your taxes. I think everyone is all right with that one but it's still lying. We have a lot of other things that are sneaking in, wiggling their way in. Are they actually OK? Are we doing them just because the people around us are doing them and we're not stopping to challenge ourselves? Personally I would rather my citizenship be to the Kingdom. I happen to live in American. I love America and I will always do my civic duty as an American but my primary loyalty I want to always be with the kingdom, whatever that means.

Every time I mention this I always want to state that I am not advocating for any armed whatever. We don't need a secondary Waco in the Restoration popping out of Mount Ayr. We need to continue being American citizens following the laws laid before us as we should. But we need to think about what it means to be dual citizens because America wants your full attention. That is its job as a country. They need your full attention but the Lord has asked us to do more.

When the Apostles were called they were citizens of Israel. They had pride in their nation I am sure. They loved what they were surrounded with I am sure. They felt the same way I felt when Michael played that video commemorating Memorial Day. You get a little teared up thinking of all the men and women who have died in service for you. You get that feeling where you are just so thankful for people doing. I assume most of us always feel that same sense of pride in our servicemen and women, be it police, military, firefighters, or EMTs wherever you want to take that to but when the Apostles were presented with the gospel they took the things that were good. They didn't just go out and become anti-Israel. That's not the right move but they held up what they understood against what they were taught. For me it's a pretty clear example with Peter where culturally they did not eat unclean things. They were concerned about Gentiles coming in to the church and the Lord said what have



I made that's unclean? That flew in the face of what he was taught because they were taught there are things that are clearly unclean. Here the Lord is giving him a vision that said what have I made that's unclean? Then he acted on that.

The most important thing that I want to say is don't listen to me. Don't listen to Michael. He's got great ideas and points or Joe or Joel or whomever. Figure out what it is that matters to you. What are your beliefs and why because if you listen to me and even take really great notes you are probably sitting down thinking I don't know where he was going with this but I've got some stuff circled. If you follow everything I have said today line by line, you are going to find yourself pretty discouraged in about a month because more than likely you'll probably find something that I said that you disagree with. That's just human nature. It might be a minor disagreement or it might be a REALLY big one but we're going to disagree at some point. If you hold me or anyone to the standard that you are going to listen to everything we say, you are going to be disappointed and you are going to be let down.

When I was in middle school or high school there were people that were the absolute gold standard of spiritual maturity. Now that I am an adult and their peer I find myself thinking that I can't believe that at one time I thought those guys were it because they are human just like me. It's up to us to determine what we believe but more importantly what you are going to do with that belief? It's really good to have all these beliefs but what matters to you and why does it matter to you and what are you going to do about it?

In closing I'd like to read out of the 4th chapter of James starting in verse 1. *From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not; Ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war; yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. (That's not an enemy but the enemy of God.) Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. (1-8) In 1st Peter 1:25 it says, *But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.**

In short, my intention of what I wanted to say today is all these things that war in our mind: who our loyalties lie with, who we feel like having a difficult conversation with, what we think through our mind when bad things happen, they are going to happen. We are going to have those thoughts and we're going to have those struggles but it's who do we go to, who do we turn to, and how. The scripture in James says pretty clearly that the Lord doesn't care much for the proud so our job is to humble ourselves and turn to Him. The mechanism by which we do that is found in the second passage. The word of the Lord endures forever. If you have a

question, you are struggling with another person, take it to the scriptures. Find your scriptural basis because we can be deceived by a lot of things, by inherent bias that we grew up with. Peter was told there were unclean things his whole life so Gentiles couldn't come in but the Lord spoke differently and we have that written down. Find that but don't just bench mark it if two of us are having a discussion. Look at your life and test it. Are my actions holding up to the standard that I know I should be keeping? Most of us would probably agree they are not. Then what are you going to do about it. Are you going to just sit there thinking that you are sad or that you are a bad guy. We can't be OK with that. We need to be willing to change but the only way we're going to know what to change is by reading the scriptures. If you are not reading you are going to have to take my word for it. If you take my word for it, we're all going to be in trouble. That's how we wound up in the Dark Ages because we only let certain people have scripture. You've been given a gift. Use it but change and move, be a living people not a stale, lukewarm, stagnant body. It's something we can all do. I'm really looking forward to the next time I come up here and you are all super buff and can run a 5-minute mile and you also have the scriptures pretty well internalized.

Whatever you choose to do my hope and my prayer is that you are asking the Lord and then just doing it. You are just reading and you are just trying to do something. You might try something and if that doesn't work, then you just try something else but don't give up. Don't go stale and when the storms come you are going to have that foundation. You'll still be able to wake up the Savior and say, 'Help me out.' But you are not going to wake Him up and say, 'Why are you letting me die.' Because your heart will be different since you know Him and you've read His word that endures forever.

How Do We Become the Church of Christ?

Priest Joe Mickelson

July 11, 2021

This morning I would like share the following. *But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. Job 12:7-10*

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every many the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another... Let love be without dissimulation... Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love... bless them that persecute you... Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep... If it be



possible, live peaceably with all men... Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans Ch. 12 (excerpts)

There are moments when the heart is generous, and then it knows that for better or worse our lives are woven together here, one with one another and with the place and all the living things. Wendell Berry (Jayber Crow)

I shared these passages this morning for a scripture reading. The first two, as I mentioned, were passages from scripture – one from the Old Testament, and one from the New. In and of themselves, these two passages don't seem to correlate with one another, and most would likely find it odd for me to pick these two in conjunction to set up a Sunday morning talk. The third passage I shared comes from a work of fiction that, since reading it several weeks ago, has given me much to consider. My hope is that this third passage sheds some light upon why I chose to share those two seemingly unrelated scriptures.

I'm going to share some thoughts with you this morning that I could envision potentially rubbing some people the wrong way. Please understand that all that I have to share is my own extraordinarily limited perspective and insight – and that I am, in no way, attempting to persuade anyone else to follow my path. I've said it before, but it bears repeating – I am not a biblical scholar. I don't claim to know a lot about Christ, but, as Oakman said, "the little I do know about Him has changed my life." All I have to offer anyone is my own experience and what I have felt led to by some force larger than myself. I love you all, and I am forever indebted to each of you for all that you've meant to me and my family the last few years.

Now that my disclaimer has been stated, I'm sure that many of you here this morning have noticed that I've been largely absent from the Mt. Ayr services for some time. There have been a number of reasons for that, some intentional and others less so. I hope to shed some light this morning upon the journey that I've been on these last few months, and what I hope the future might entail.

First and foremost, one reason for our family's sporadic church attendance has been the development of our fourth child. Anna has battled nausea more severely with this pregnancy than with the three boys. Many people told us early on that this probably meant we were going to be having a baby girl. Being in a house full of boys, we were hesitant to believe that hypothesis. Surely enough, she is far enough along now for the ultrasounds to verify the speculation, and we are indeed going to be having a daughter – news that was very well-received and welcomed by all in our family. The primary issue now is that, after spending so many years thinking of boys' names, we have struggled to come up with a satisfactory name for a girl. I suppose we'll have to rely upon revelation.

Outside of the Sunday mornings when we stayed home due to the trials of pregnancy, there have been others in which I was hurriedly trying to plant as many acres as possible ahead of a rain. There have been some spent in Illinois visiting the Forth family. There have been one or two which were spent by the boys and I on a pond dam with fishing poles. There have been some spent with family or friends at our home, sharing a meal and enjoying casual conversations about faith, parenting, farming, or whatever

other topic might arise. One Sunday morning was spent on the farm of some long-time friends of the family, worshipping in the open air with the Andover congregation.

There have been many in which my morning was spent caring for the various forms of livestock that we've accumulated – watching pigs enjoy a fresh bale of bedding, listening to the birds sing and the new calf frolic around the pasture while I milk the Jersey cow, or relishing in the growth of the grass as I stake out a new paddock for the cattle to graze.

I have missed seeing all of you, and I cherish all that this congregation has to offer. But I have also felt strengthened and humbled these last few weeks while participating in more unconventional forms of worship.

For at least the past year, I have foregone tuning in to the national news. It's been one of the best decisions of my life, and I couldn't recommend it more highly to all of you. Despite my attempts to "tune out the noise," however, I still am aware of the great tensions that this nation is facing. We now live in a society in which there are only two acceptable points of view: you're either on the left, or you're on the right, and if you are on the side opposite myself, it is socially acceptable (and even encouraged) for me to hate you for it – or, at the very least, for me to attempt to persuade you to jump ship and abandon all you believe so that you can join me in my knowledge of the absolute truth.

Each side believes in "one best way," or, even worse, "an only way" for the country to move forward from where we now are. There is no time nor use in engaging in thoughtful and humble debate. In fact, humility (here used to mean a sense that we may not know everything) increasingly seems to be an archaic trait of character. John Winthrop, who you historians will know as the first governor of Massachusetts and an influential political and religious figure in America's colonial history, once said: "... We must be knit together in this work as one man, we must entertain each other in brotherly affection... We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor, and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us, as His own people and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness, and truth than formerly we have been acquainted with."

As the nation we see on television and hear about on the radio grows more divided, I have determined to focus on my own membership in my own community. That community is small, yet it is abundantly diverse, and even more abundantly beautiful. My roots have spent nearly 150 years digging into this membership – dating back to C.P. Mickelson in the 1870s who settled on a small farm south of Lamoni. There are names of members that have been entrenched in this community at least as long as mine: Bergman, Brenizer, Carpenter, Stoll, Briggs, Stobbe, Sneath, Lane, Riser, and so many more. Others have joined more recently, but are equally vital to the health of what



remains of this community – names like Yoder, Byler, Quick, and Motis.

Included in the membership of this community is the land itself and all that it entails. It has been steadfast and faithful. It has endured abuse and neglect at times, and enjoyed abundance and provision when given proper care and reverence. It participates in unison with the hands of the men and women who rely upon it.

Within the context of this community, my ability to participate and create influence in a meaningful way is relatively significant. I can help my neighbor understand the love of Christ by helping him patch fence. I can receive witness of God's grace by walking through a lush perennial pasture near my home, ready and waiting to provide all that the cattle will need.

Outside of this community resides a slightly larger one that entails within its membership the citizens of the town which can be seen in the distance from our farm. My membership within the community of Lamoni dates back as long as my membership to my place. Here again, though the scale of this community is large enough to diminish my individual influence, membership within the context of Lamoni, Iowa still offers opportunity to demonstrate the Gospel in practical ways. I can offer the community insight into neighborliness by ensuring I don't deplete the soil, pollute the water, or stink up the air that surrounds the area. I can demonstrate love and humility by worshipping with congregations within that community with which I may not always see eye to eye on the finer points of doctrine. They can minister to me those same principles by greeting me with a smile and a hug as I walk in the doors of their church.

Because I have no meaningful or realistic hope of influencing much beyond the communities to which I hold membership, I have chosen to dig in here. I not only accept my membership within these bodies, but I embrace it, and all that it entails.

However, embracing your dependence and responsibility to a community inherently requires that you also embrace the community for what it is, what it was, and what it could be.

I am joined together with fellow members who think and live differently than I do. Some are atheist or agnostic. Some are ordained women of the Community of Christ priesthood. Some are good farmers who care for their land, others abuse it and take all they can from it without giving back. Some like to spend their Saturday nights with friends and a cooler of beer. Others fast and pray often. All are members. All are a part of me, and all both deserve and require my love.

My vision of the gathered church that had come to me... had been replaced by a vision of the gathered community. What I saw now was the community imperfect and irresolute but held together by the frayed and always fraying, incomplete and yet ever-holding bonds of the various sorts of affection. There had maybe never been anybody who had not been loved by somebody, who had been loved by somebody else, and so on and on... It was a community always disappointed in itself, disappointing its members, always trying to contain its divisions and gentle its meanness, always failing and yet always preserving a sort of will toward goodwill. I knew that, in the midst of all the

ignorance and error; this was a membership. It was a membership of this (place) and of no other place on earth. My vision gathered the community as it never will be gathered in this world of time, for the community must always be marred by members who are indifferent to it or against it, who are nonetheless its members and maybe nonetheless essential to it. And yet I saw them all as somehow perfected, beyond time, by one another's love, compassion, and forgiveness, as it is said we may be perfected by grace. Wendell Berry (Jayber Crow)

I fear that many in the Restoration – many in any sort of organized church, for that matter – have fallen into the same political trap of “us vs. them” that we see demonstrated on the national media and in Washington D.C. I think many Christians fear that if we live, worship, and fellowship amongst those who believe differently than we do, we are condoning their behavior and participating in their sin. Sometimes, I worry that we would have joined the Pharisees in our indignation with Christ for dining with publicans and sinners.

In times like these, we often say that we must be the lighted candle, held up for the world to see as an example of how to live. Usually, it seems, we take that to mean that we must segregate ourselves from our fellow man, and live so pure and spotless of lives that others take notice. Perhaps that is true – I certainly won't advocate against living as righteously as possible.

Perhaps, however, the way that we offer light to the world is not necessarily through spotless scourging of our lives and withdrawal from the sinner, but rather through a radical demonstration of love for our neighbor.

The poet William Blake wrote a poem entitled, The Divine Image, in which he writes:

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love is God our father dear, and mercy, pity, peace, and love is Man his child and care.

Mercy, pity, peace, and love are the attributes of our Father in Heaven. As long as any man or woman is capable of demonstrating those qualities, the image of their Creator can be found within them, as well. The image of God can be found, and should be given reverence, in every person who has ever demonstrated these qualities in their lives.

We are not to look to what men in themselves deserve but to attend to the image of God which exists in all and to which we owe all honor and love. - John Calvin

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity. Proverbs 17:17

I believe that the proper response to our current state of affairs to “scale back.” We cannot hope to mend the brokenness of the world, but we can go to work mending the brokenness in our lives right here at home – in our families and our community, however you define it. My decisions and actions to worship and seek the Lord through different means and in unconventional methods may be contrary to what many of you think is right. I won't argue that with you. But know that my decisions are coming from a place of love,



concern, and reliance upon my neighbor, and neighborhood – from the farmer that lives down the road, to the woods that can be seen from my window.

I seek not to convert the members of this community to “my side” or my way of thinking. I seek only to love and to serve each of them. Attempts for one human to change the mind of another are futile 99% of the time. Just consider how difficult it would be for someone to persuade you that were wrong about your beliefs about the Lord, about politics, about abortion, about same-sex marriage, etc. etc. Attempts to persuade others out of their own deeply entrenched beliefs and understandings are equally futile, because their viewpoints come from equally valid experiences and considerations as yours. Our lives, in all their diversity and complexity, shape our perceptions. Now, we ALL see through a glass darkly. Attempts to love one another, however, are never futile. Forgiveness is never a lost cause. Mercy, pity, peace, and love will always yield results.

I will, once again, steal a passage from my favorite writer, Kentucky farmer, Wendell Berry. In one of his short stories, he tells of a murder that is committed by a man named Thad Coulter. Thad is a fictional farmer, who in an attempt to help his wayward son, mortgages the family farm. Things take a bad turn, and Thad finds himself face to face with the prospect of losing the farm that has been in his family’s care for generations. Drunk and in despair, he turns to his neighbor and friend, Ben Feltner, for help. Ben, in his wisdom, asks Thad to come back to him to talk after he’s slept and sobered up. Upset by that proposal, the drunken Thad Coulter goes home and grabs his gun, and, in his stupor, returns to shoot and kill his friend who had angered him.

After the act of violence, Thad reports himself to the local authorities, and submits to his jail cell. In that cell, he is visited by his daughter, Martha Elizabeth, who sees all that he has done and the consequences that will now fall upon their entire family, and chooses to love her father nonetheless. Thad is distraught by Martha’s love and forgiveness, and takes his own life shortly thereafter. Following this event, Berry writes:

People sometimes talk of God’s love as if it’s a pleasant thing. But it is terrible, in a way. Think of all it includes. It included Thad Coulter, drunk and mean and foolish, before he killed Mr. Feltner, and it included him afterwards. That’s what Thad saw. He saw his guilt. He had killed his friend. He had done what he couldn’t undo; he had destroyed what he couldn’t make. But in the same moment he saw his guilt included in love that stood as near him as Martha Elizabeth and at that moment wore her flesh. It was surely weak and wrong of him to kill himself – to sit in judgment that way over himself. But surely God’s love includes people who can’t bear it.

Does our love include even those in our lives who can not bear it? Does it include those who don’t deserve it, or cannot reciprocate it? God’s love does, and we diminish who He is when we fail to recognize that fact.

I don’t know what the future holds – for me, for my family, or for my community. I don’t have any right to know what that future holds. My responsibility is simply to go to work right here and now – to be a good member of my

community – to offer support to those in need who are within my grasp – to heal the land beneath my feet and honor the creation that sustains me, as well as the community that sustains me. My calling is to take the gospel with me every step I take – sometimes that may mean sharing a scripture with someone in need, but more often than not it simply requires an act of sincere kindness. It requires meeting the need of someone else, without qualification.

We must learn to differentiate God’s will and the will of the Church. We must learn to discern tradition from doctrine. We must re-learn what it means to be human, and the qualities of humility, empathy, and compassion that are required of us if we are to be like our Savior. We must take this faith of ours out of our heads and put it to use with our hands in practical ways. We must acknowledge that the membership of the Church is far more inclusive than we often visualize, and even includes the creatures of the fields and the streams. We must recognize that each member of the Church of Christ – whether they worship in an RLDS setting or a Baptist setting, or whether they don’t worship at all – or whether they worship in their very existence as a tree in a forest – each member requires our care and affection.

We must do less talking and do more demonstrating. We must come to the conclusion that salvation and conversion do not stem from an analysis of information in the mind, but rather from meaningful experiences that touch the heart.

As I have read the Gospels over the years, the belief has grown in me that Christ did not come to found an organized religion but came instead to found an unorganized one. He seems to have come to carry religion out of the temples into the fields and sheep pastures, onto the roadsides and the banks of the rivers, into the houses of sinners and publicans, into the town and the wilderness, toward the membership of all that is here. Well, you can read and see what you think. Wendell Berry (Jayber Crow)

Some Good News

“My Presence Shall Be Felt Among My People” (message given through Apostle Donald O. Chesworth in April 1969 - a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles 1950-1972)

Just as I spoke to My servants of old, I am willing to speak now and make known My will, when My people come before Me in humility and seek Me in faith – seek Me in the simplicity of a little child; and when I speak, believe My words. Come even now to my throne and listen.

I know the shadows look deep around you, but can’t you see My face through the clouds? I am smiling upon my covenant people, that they may know the warmth of my love. Know ye that just as I stood in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and they were



freed from their bonds and came out without even the smell of fire upon their garments, even so will I be with My people today.

Many of you feel that you have been tossed right into the fiery furnace because of the conditions that surround you on every hand, but you are failing to recognize My blessings. Your eyes are on the fiery furnace - or in other words, the darts of Satan that he has sent forth in a mighty whirlwind. My promises are true, and have I not said that even in these very days you are living in, Satan would have power over his own? But I would have power over My people. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego kept their faith and trust in Me; and even if their lives had been taken, they would have come to me rejoicing - and the victory would still have been theirs.

I know that flesh is weak, and therefore I am very merciful, but I would instill in My people perfect faith and confidence in Me, and in the words I speak. Seek Me often. When My children come before Me, My ears are open to their pleas, and I would like to speak in comforting words and in counsel. It is needful that you keep your lives clean and pure, and that you keep My commandments. Keep alert to your opportunities to do good.

I am not a harsh taskmaster. I am harsh only against sin and evil, and things that destroy. Seek Me often and speak freely, and I will speak peace to your souls. I am not come to destroy, but to set you free. Do not trifle with My words. The arm of flesh has failed you and the wisdom of men is fast sinking into oblivion - sinking to rise no more. Henceforth My voice will guide the people of My choice, and the wisdom that comes from above will be plainly manifest. So great will be the contrast, that you will wonder how you even could have listened for a moment to the other.

I planned without a mistake, for My wisdom is perfect, and My love is beyond comprehension. You should have listened always to My voice, and when men veered from My blueprint, given plainly in My word, you should have refused to follow, maintained your integrity and pleaded My cause before the throne. This,

many of you have done to the best of your ability, and it is for your benefit, and to comfort you, that I now speak. Truth will be freed from bondage and will sweep the earth as I have told you, lo these many years.

You feel that you have struggled against all odds to overcome, but as My Spirit is poured out upon you, in greater abundance than you have ever known, the shackles of sin will be broken, righteousness will abound in your midst, and Zionic conditions will be established [so much so] that you will embrace one another in My great love.

Many of your hearts are pure before Me. Your prayers will be answered and My angels will indeed be in your midst, to bring light and understanding and to assist in your labors. Labor for Zion in all you do. Cast out selfishness far from you, and remember that all My children are precious in My sight. Be willing to minister and do good to all who are brought within your reach. Ask that My Spirit will bless your work. My power is in your midst!

The enemy is strong and his forces are combined; but My strength is greater, and My forces are being gathered together rapidly. There are glorious victories coming for the army of the Lord!

This is the closing hour for the enemy. He has invaded the land of Zion and polluted it, until My people are fearful. To you he seems to have wound those silken cords and spread his net, until there is no way to escape. Even though I have told you the way is opening, you still ponder in your hearts; but it will come speedily.

Even as the lightning flashes and lightens up the whole world as it spreads from one end of heaven to the other, and your eyes are momentarily blinded by the brilliance, so shall My presence be felt among My people, and My power wielded in their behalf. In a much shorter time than you expect, the land of Zion will be cleansed. My Temple will be builded and My servants sanctified and sent out to gather in the harvest, even as I planned from the beginning.

I cleanse by mighty power, but also by mighty power I protect and provide for My people. Know this, I am never taken unaware.



What happens to you as great dangers, were planned and provided for, even before the earth was born; and My people need have no fear. Even the severe trials many of you have passed through are but the cleansing process that has drawn you closer to Me, and purged your life of the dross that could not enter into My Kingdom.

Again I say unto you, be encouraged, and listen for My voice as it enlightens your minds and gladdens your hearts, and brings peace to your souls. Many of you will see the angels and converse with them; dreams and visions will increase, prophecies and tongues will be given - for I have much to give and many blessings to bestow. Be faithful and obedient, and rest assured in My love for you and in My care, and I will provide.

My son, that thou should not walk without light, I give you this morning to prepare yourself, and as many as will listen and give heed to that which you will say to them in regard to the things which will soon transpire on the earth. I warn you that you shall not be caught unaware; but more that you shall believe and be strengthened; for your faith must be made equal to the day in which you will be required to use it.

In the immediate future you shall see much bloodshed in the streets of this nation. The government shall be shaken to its very foundation and appear to be fallen, but I will preserve it for the sake of My people and Zion, for My will shall be done. Many problems shall vex the nations, economically, physically and financially. There will be disasters, especially on the West Coast, where their cup of iniquity is full and running over. Prepare yourselves in righteousness, and seek through faith to endure the storms which shall soon descend upon you. Prepare in all ways that seem wise to you, with much prayer.

My church is fast approaching such a condition that I must bring to naught their clever schemes for the destruction of My Church by Satan. Seek to strengthen others. Be not dismayed by the events soon to come. Stand true and faithful, and I will stand with you.

O My People, Saith the Spirit

O my people, saith the Spirit,
Hear the word of God today;
Be not slothful but obedient,
'Tis the world's momentous day!
Unto honor I have called you -
Honor great as angels know;
Heed ye, then, a Father's counsel,
And by deeds your purpose show.

Time is ripe! My work must hasten!
Whoso will may bide the hour.
Naught can harm whom God protecteth -
Elements confess his power.
Up ye, then, to the high places
I have bid you occupy!
Peril waits upon the heedless,
Grace upon the souls who try!

Love ye me and love all people -
Love as I have loved you;
This your calling - this my purpose -
Thus be my disciples true.
Then in this exalted station
Your companion I will be;
Every promise of my Scriptures
Will be verified in thee.

Get ye up, then, to your mountain,
Zion of this closing day!
For the glory of my coming
Waits to break upon your way!
Forth from thence your testimony
Shall to trembling nations go,
And the world confess that with you
God has residence below.



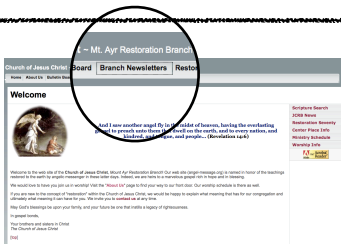
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And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for 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)

We are entering an uncertain time in our nation, the world, and our church. Please remember to pray for our nation, those in government-local, state and federal; our court system-local, state and federal; the mainstream media and entertainment industry.

We also need to pray for our church that we will desire to be One. Our congregation, in particular, is going through a time of change and prayers are needed that we will make wise choices and be a light not only to Mount Ayr but also to Lamoni; that above all we will love one another and always be there for each other.