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Church of Jesus Christ

Mount Ayr Restoration Branch

NEWSLETTER

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Contents:

Ron Smith- pg. 2

Joe Mickelson - pg. 3

Michael Jordison - pg. 7

Joshua Jordison - pg. 11

Chris Pedersen - pg. 14

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven; A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)



Reconciliation

Patriarch Ronald Smith

August 1, 2021

My scripture for this morning is taken from 2 Corinthians 5:15-17. *Therefore if any man live in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new, And receiveth all the things of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:15-17*

During the last hour, I told about a couple of baptismal services I was at last Sunday. One of the young ladies who was baptized was Monica. She is nine or 10 years old, and she was so excited about being baptized! Before the baptism, she came to me and said, "I'm just so nervous." And when she got out of the water, and we got our clothes changed, the first thing she said to me was, "Welcome to the new me!" She was just so bubbly and excited. The scripture that I read says, *If any man live in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.* And for Monica, they really did become new.

There is another part of this scripture that I would like to have us focus on this morning. This piece is perhaps a little bit different than the way we have usually thought of it. It says, "God is in Christ"--which of course we all believe--"reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." And in the previous verse, it says he has given to us the "ministry of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:18)

What does it mean for God to give to us the ministry of reconciliation? A lot of people think that we just need to tell people that they can be reconciled to God because of what Christ has done. And that certainly is part of what we need to do, but the reconciliation is what Jesus has done. I think there is more to it than that. If Jesus has really given to us the ministry of reconciliation, then there's maybe something that we need to do that has to do with reconciliation. And indeed, Jesus did talk about the ministry of reconciliation, which he has entrusted to us. You can find this in Matthew. *Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. (Matthew 18:15-17)*

This is the law of reconciliation which Jesus taught. And it's interesting that He starts off by saying if somebody trespasses against you, you go to him alone and talk to him about it. Now, is that the way that the world says to do things? Usually when somebody hurts us, what do we do? We go to all of our friends, who we think are going to take our side, and we tell them first. Right? We gather the biggest group around us that thinks like we do and say, you know, "They are on our side." And we tell them about the things that have happened. We get on our phones and we text our friends and say, "Ooh, that person did this to me." Right? That's the first thing we do but that's not what Jesus said to do. In fact, if you listen to how the reconciliation of God goes, He says that *God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.* (2 Corinthians 5:19)

He says the way that reconciliation goes is you don't start by saying what the person has done wrong. You don't impute their trespasses unto them. And He says, if somebody has hurt you. You go and talk to them. You go alone and talk to them. Okay? You don't take a bunch of friends. You don't try and trap them. You don't take a tape recorder and make sure that you record every word that they said. You go to them alone, and I think this law of reconciliation has some real possibilities. When other people hurt us, we need to think about what God has done for us in not imputing our trespasses to us. That is what reconciliation is about: trying to gain a brother or sister by talking to them, instead of first talking to everybody that we think is going to take our part. Jesus says, if they don't accept you, if they don't reconcile with you, then you take one or two—one or two—not a whole bunch, one or two, and you go to them again so that every word can be established. And you try and reconcile with them. You try and make it right. And if that doesn't work, then you can tell the church, but the church is the last people that should hear about it, not the first. They're the last people, because if you tell the church, you're supposed to have already tried at least twice to reconcile, once by yourself and once with someone else. So, do any of you have somebody that you need to be reconciled with?

Well, I do. I mean I've thought about it, because I had time to think about it. And I do. There is somebody. But, but they were really bad, don't you know? And I haven't said anything about them and I'm not going to. I'm not going to tell you about them because I can't, you know, but they were really bad and I've kind of just put them off to the side and said I won't be mad at them. I'll forgive them. But, have I reconciled with them? Have I talked with them? I haven't. And I need to. My wife does too. (Now she's really worried.) I can't tell you what this person did because you might know who it is.

The Bible says that God has given the ministry of reconciliation to us. He's given us this gift. He has given us the power to reconcile and to be reconciled. And He knows that it's not always going to work. But He knows that it needs to be tried. And so, I'm just putting it out there. I know it has to happen for me, and I'm hoping that I'll have the courage to do it. I'm putting it out there because I think we need to do it.

Eric Odida is my good friend from Kenya and we did some ministry together. He was the one that had me baptize Monica. Normally I would let the local priesthood do it, but as I explained this morning, there weren't any local priesthood there. So I went ahead and baptized Monica and Eunice, another lady. Then we went to another town, and there were some baptisms to be done, so he handed me my wet clothes and said, "You baptize some more." So I baptized seven others.

Eric is an interesting fellow, and he gives some really good ministry. He told me one day, "The big problem is that God made us all with two legs." What do you mean, two legs? He said, "Well, we want one leg in the kingdom, and one leg in the world." And it's true. Most of the time we just stand with one leg in the kingdom and don't try to get both legs there. We try and reserve someone that we can fight with, we try and save someone that we won't be reconciled with, someone that we won't treat quite as good as we ought to treat them as a brother or sister. Right? One leg in the kingdom, and one in the world. We've got two legs. I thought that was pretty good.

Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world. And when you think about that His kingdom is quite a bit different than the kingdoms of this world. I'd like to share a little parable. The Scriptures tell us that all things bear record of God (Genesis 6:66). I thought about a little carbon atom. I know a lot of you know a little bit about what a carbon atom is, it's a really tiny thing. Carbon atoms are part of the mineral kingdom, and they don't know



very much, but they do know how to hang on to oxygen atoms. A carbon atom will grab on to two oxygens and will hold those so tight that they become a single molecule of carbon dioxide. They fly around and go lots of places but they stay carbon dioxide. It is really hard to get a carbon to not be with two oxygens. If they are not bound to a carbon atom, oxygens hang on to two hydrogens and they become H₂O which is water. And that is basically what carbon and oxygen atoms do. They obey the laws of the mineral kingdom. That is the law that God made and they obey that law. But something amazing, absolutely amazing happens. If a little carbon atom with his two oxygens gets absorbed by a plant leaf, and water gets absorbed by the roots and the water gets up there with the carbon and the sunlight hits it— it's really complex, we call it photosynthesis. It's an amazing thing that you'll read about in biology class sometime — I learned about it in seventh grade—You probably got it in third grade, right? Yeah.

Okay, so this amazing thing happens when the sunlight hits it. Somehow that carbon gives up its oxygen. Instead of hanging on to oxygens, it hangs on to other carbons, and makes a long chain of carbons. Occasionally there's an oxygen atom in there and occasionally there's a hydrogen atom in there and it becomes sugar. When it is sugar, because it's hanging on to all these other carbons instead of hanging on to those two oxygens, it not only becomes good for us, but it stores the energy of the sun! And it becomes part of a fruit and it becomes part of life. Things that carbon atoms could never have dreamed of—if carbon atoms could dream, which I don't think they can, but if they could—they wouldn't dream about being part of life, something that could reproduce and make more life, and all of those things that plants do because they are part of the plant kingdom. The carbon atom becomes part of a new kingdom with the light of the sun. Isn't that amazing?

Then, a person comes and picks that fruit, and they eat it. And once again, the carbon chains get pulled apart. Okay, that's called digestion and that sugar becomes part of a person. And now that sugar is in a totally different kingdom. In this kingdom, you can love and you can hate and you can do things that the plants never even dreamed of—if the plants could dream.

And then, the son comes along—a different sun this time. And He says, if you'll follow me, all things will become new. Those old things that you grabbed on to and thought you were doing right by, that's not what's important here. I've got new things to grab on to. You know you can't be just a single carbon atom and be part of the plant kingdom. You have to grab on to other carbons and become sugar. And you can't be just a single sugar molecule and be part of the animal kingdom. And you can't be a single individual and be part of the Kingdom of God. You can't just do your own thing because part of what the Kingdom of God is about is being linked to our brothers and sisters with new laws. The laws of the Kingdom of God are different than the laws of human kingdoms. In human kingdoms, what do we want? We want justice, and we want equity—an eye for an eye, a tooth for tooth. If they hurt me, then I will hurt them. If they kill us, we will kill them. If you do this, I do that, and we'll all come out equal. Right? It never seems to work out that way but that is what we think we want. That is what the law is. We want justice. We want equity.

But then the son comes along. He says that's not the way it is in the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God, grace and forgiveness are the law. It is reconciliation, not because you've done the right things, but because I'm willing to not impute your trespasses to you so that you can be with Me in My Kingdom, and you can be with the other people that you have this bond with. It's a new bond, and it requires the energy of the son in order to be there.

That is what we come together for when we come to the communion table. Jesus says, “This is my body broken for you, this

is my blood which was shed for you.” And, yes, it is just bread and grape juice but it represents the breaking of the old bonds and making the new bonds, so that we can be new. And He's tried to tell us that in so many different parables in so many different ways. And Jesus said, “Unto what shall I liken the kingdom of God?” It's like a man who took a little seed and he put it into his garden—grain of mustard that grew into a great tree, and the fowls of the air lodge there. It's not something that is overwhelming. It is just a little tiny thing. It starts off by keeping the commandments of God.

When we take this communion, we promise that we are going to take His name and remember Him always and that means we are going to remember what He has done. He has reconciled us to Him by not imputing our trespasses. How can we go on imputing trespasses to everybody else—if the ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to us? We have to be different. We have to be the ones who have grace. We have to be the ones who will forgive. Forgiveness isn't about the other person. Forgiveness is about what happens to us. We can't allow the hatred to be in ourselves. We can't allow the fear and the things that fester in us—the bad feelings about other people. We just can't do that. We have to be willing to take the first step. That's what it means, I believe, to have the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us. We have to do the things as God would do them in His kingdom.

Well that is just a parable. Hopefully you can see that we need each other. And we need to recognize that those who come to Christ and repent are the body of Christ. As we partake of the communion this morning, we witness that we are willing to take His name, and to be part of that body, and to be connected to all of those others who are part of His body. And we witness that we're willing to always remember Him and keep His commandments. That means—and I'm just doing one little thing here—that means that we need to be reconciled to one another and if we're not already there, it means that we witness that we're willing to be there and we're going to go from here and we're going to do that. And we're going to try it and see if it doesn't work. *Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.* (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

So I'm hoping that, like Monica, when we get up from the communion today we can say, “Welcome to the new me,” because we're part of the Kingdom of God. We've broken the bonds that held us. They weren't necessarily bad things that we did, but we need to make new bonds with those about us. We need to make new bonds with the children of Christ, we need to be willing to not impute trespasses to others but have grace and mercy, and obey the laws of the Kingdom of God, and not just the laws of man.

Therefore if any man live in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new, And receiveth all the things of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19)

May God bless you as you partake of the communion and as you remember the covenant which you have made. May you witness once again, that you're willing to take His name. and remember Him and keep His commandments.

Lessons Taught by the Parable of the Good

Samaritan

Priest Joe Mickelson

August 22, 2021

My scripture for this morning is taken from Luke 10:25-37. *And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested*



(Jesus), saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. And your neighbor as yourself." And (Jesus) said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'" "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

I have come to understand that, throughout my time giving sermons to congregations, I have really only ever given one sermon. Every time I speak, it is an attempt to more adequately and fully express the same concepts and ideas over and over again. Today will be no different. Perhaps one of these days, I will have gotten it right and can move on to new ideas, but, thus far I am not satisfied that I have adequately said what needs to be said.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most frequently recited portions of Christ's teachings, and for good reason. It strips the Gospel and the will of God down to its bare bones, and simultaneously offers a plain and simple truth while also entailing enough hidden meaning to bring greater revelation with each reading.

Most of us, I think, are at least partially aware of the significance of the fact that it was the Samaritan, rather than the priest or the Levite, who offered help to the stranger in need. The longstanding, engrained division between the Samaritans and the Jews was well known by anyone and everyone who heard the words of our Lord.

Historian Lawrence Schiffman gives us some more detailed context to help us understand the significance of Christ's decision to portray the Samaritan as the "good neighbor" in a crowd full of Jews. He writes: "When the Judeans returned to rebuild the Temple in about 520 B.C., the Samaritans, identifying with the Judeans, offered to help in the endeavor. The Judeans rejected the Samaritans because of their questionable Jewish descent... As a result, long centuries of hostility began. The Samaritans constantly attempted to block the rebuilding of Jerusalem by appealing to Persian authorities... Throughout this period, the Samaritans continued to have an ambiguous status as Jews. They were regarded as Jews who had somehow been corrupted in their religious practices. (Over the course of the next 600 years), the Samaritans (would come to be) treated as non-Jews... Jews would not marry Samaritans, and at some point Samaritans were forbidden to marry Jews. These two groups saw themselves as independent religious communities, acknowledging only their historical connections. The rise of the modern state of Israel has ameliorated the social aspects of this conflict, but Jews are still forbidden to marry Samaritans."

Christ could have chosen other protagonists for this parable, perhaps a Jewish tax collector. The point would still have

been made, but would have been slightly less shocking to the Jewish audience. Instead, our Lord went to the greatest lengths to drive His point home – the one who you despise, who you disagree with religiously and politically, who you deem to be a sinner and unworthy of your attention and affection – that is who not only shows love to their neighbor, but does so in a way that goes far beyond what would be expected of him in that situation. Not only does he help the stranger in need, but he sets him upon his mule, pays for his care and lodging, and leaves with a promise to continue supporting the man in whatever needs may arise in the days to come.

The Priest and the Levite, who represent the religious orthodoxy of the time that was supposed to be upholding and living out the will of God, walked right on past this destitute stranger on the road. I don't think it's a stretch to envision that both of these men may have felt some sense of compassion for the man. Perhaps they offered prayers for the man as they went past. Perhaps they had a moment of hesitation in which they struggled with whether or not they ought to offer aid. Perhaps it was fear of the unknown regarding the man's situation and character that discouraged them from stepping in. They may have felt as though it was God's will that this man suffered so, and that his current state was judgement for his sin. More likely, they were simply on their own way to carry out their own tasks, and did not want to be delayed or disturbed as they went about their business.

Regardless of the reasonings that led to the priest and Levite ignoring the needs of their neighbor along the road, the end result is the same – the only man who had the love of God within him that day was the Samaritan. Whether he knew he was doing God's will or not, the Samaritan allowed love and compassion to dictate his actions, and the life of the stricken stranger was better for it.

Dr. Amy-Jill Levine provides this commentary on the parable:

"The parable offers... a vision of life rather than death. It evokes 2 Chronicles 28, which recounts how the prophet Oded convinced the Samaritans to aid their Judean captives. It insists that enemies can prove to be neighbors, that compassion has no boundaries, and that judging people on the basis of their religion or ethnicity will leave us dying in a ditch."

The Samaritan did not stop and evaluate the worthiness of the stranger in need. He did not even seem to consider the fact that the man may be a Jew, and a historical enemy to his own people. He didn't care about the circumstances that led to the man's situation and whether or not he brought them upon himself. He asked no questions. He simply responded as a neighbor ought to respond – with an act of unconditional love that went the extra mile.

We have discussions from time to time about salvation and how we are saved. Perhaps better stated, we have made the attempt to discern what it is that saves us and gives us hope of eternal life. Typically, our conversations on this topic compare salvation by grace, salvation by faith, and salvation by works – or some combination of the three. I would argue that salvation, though it is given by grace through faith, is rooted in love. That's a concept that we often overlook. *As the Father loved me, I also have loved you; abide in my love... These things I have spoken to you that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* (John 15:9-12)

The world is lacking in a lot of areas today, but none more-so than love, specifically neighborly love. And we Christians are as much, if not more, to blame for this as any non-believer. That's the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan, is it not? "We need better government, no doubt about it. But we also need better



minds, better friendships, better marriages, better communities.”
(Wendell Berry)

We speak of loving one another frequently, but I am not convinced that the majority of Christians have undergone the effort of wrestling with what loving your neighbor truly entails – what it looks like, feels like, and how it plays out on a daily basis.

I’m at a point in my life – perhaps at a point in my spiritual journey, as much as I dislike that term -in which I’m tired of pretending. I’m tired of pretending that I don’t have doubts. I’m tired of pretending that my faith and conviction in certain doctrines is so strong as to be knowledge of an absolute truth. I’m tired of pretending that I really know much of anything, to be honest.

I have lots of questions and lots of doubts. I am less and less interested in spiritual concepts that don’t have physical patterns in the world around me from which I can gain some sort of context and understanding. I am less concerned about what the future holds, and more concerned about what I can do today, right here, with the people around me and the ground beneath my feet. I care less about what others believe and more about how they treat others. Religious beliefs that can not be carried out in practical ways in the physical world that we live in don’t rise very high on my priority list.

I am no longer afraid to doubt. I am no longer afraid to ask questions that seem to have no answers. I will continue to seek out those answers, but I have no assurance or expectation that I will find them in this lifetime. And I am perfectly ok with that. Throughout all of the questioning, doubting, and re- evaluating that I’ve done these past few months, two things have occurred: (1) my faith in Jesus Christ has grown stronger than ever before, and (2) my love and compassion for those who believe differently than I do have expanded exponentially.

Rather than reading scriptures in an attempt to prove that my form of worship is better than someone else’s, I’ve read in attempt to learn how I can better exemplify the love of Christ. Rather than seeking evidence that my beliefs about salvation are truer than another Christian’s beliefs, I’ve sought to understand why they believe the way they do, and how I can better appreciate the role they play in the work of the Lord.

We see our God through His creation that surrounds us. We catch glimpses of His character and of His will in the living world that sustains us, and in the neighbors that comprise our communities. It is no wonder that we all would formulate slightly different views on God’s will and even His character. Our context and life experiences in this physical place that He created will greatly influence our interpretation of Him. It is no wonder that there is such diversity in how we worship and what we believe. We see through a glass darkly, and we are only able to see what is in front of us. Why, then, should we spend so much time and energy in convincing others that what we see with our eyes is more valid than what they see with theirs?

I have been called to something, of that I am sure. What I have been called to, I have yet to fully understand. All I know for certain, is that, no matter what else my calling entails, it centers on love. Therefore, I must learn what love looks like, and how it is to be put into action. At times, this requires experimentation – trial and error. It expects of me to push the limits, and to see how far I can take that love. It begins at home – with my wife and children. It extends to the land and livestock that are entrusted to my care. It certainly entails the Yoder family down the road, and the Quicks beyond them. That love must be taught to encompass the diverse body of townspeople just a few miles away. It must be exercised and expanded, it must never be content, must never seem to be completed, and must be ever-evolving to meet the needs of my neighbors and my Lord. Sometimes, that love must change who I am, what I think, how I speak, and how I behave. It can challenge

my beliefs and convictions, and can open my mind to new possibilities, or, at the very least, to greater empathy for the convictions of others. It must be THE priority, not a priority. It takes precedent over all else.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law... if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying... ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)

The power of love, genuinely held in the heart and enacted through physical demonstrations of support and care, can overcome anything. That power can overcome differences in beliefs, trials of temptation, physical burdens, political divisions, and anything else that causes turmoil in our lives today. Our problems will persist, but love will bind us to one another in a way that allows us to endure as an interdependent community.

Love in a vacuum, however, is rather worthless. Proclamations of love for our fellow humans, whether made aloud or in our own minds, mean very little. I cannot love Christ unless I can learn to love my fellow man. Learning to love my fellow man at large requires that I first learn to love my neighbor.

If there is one issue I can take with the parable of the Good Samaritan it is that it is relatively easy to demonstrate love to someone on one occasion when you see them in need. It is much more difficult to maintain a lifetime of love for someone you live with. You must endure good times and bad, agreements and disputes, accomplishments and failures, sickness and health. It is said that there is no greater miracle than genuinely loving someone that you really know.

If we are to respond to Christ’s call to love one another, we must start by loving the people we are with. We must look them in the eye and clearly see their scars, and love them nonetheless. We must see the bad within them, together with the good, and recognize the unique beauty that the combination creates. Our judgements of their lives must be tempered with humility and an understanding that context is everything. Our context generates our judgements, and their context dictates theirs. And we can love one another daily regardless of that fact.

Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. (Proverbs 3:3-4)

Love is as strong as death... its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised. (Song of Solomon 8:6-7)

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Love is the ticket to salvation. I don’t care if the salvation in question is eternal and spiritual, or physical and temporal. Love is the only redeemable power in this universe. Throughout the Gospels, the orthodox religious figures attempt to either gain understanding or prove Christ wrong by posing questions regarding the letter of the law. They want intellectual and legal proofs to justify their beliefs and their positions. Time and again, Christ



responds by highlighting the power and the need for a kind of love that is foreign to the religious leaders of the time, and remains foreign to most of us today. Again, that's the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The question was posed, "Who gets eternal life, and how can it be attained?" Christ's answer was simple: love your neighbor. He told us how to do it, and demonstrated that it can be done by even the unlikeliest of men and women who have empathy and compassion in their hearts.

"Love is what carries you, for it is always there, even in the dark, or most in the dark, but shining out at times like gold stitches in a piece of embroidery."

"I take literally the statement in the Gospel of John that God loves the world. I believe that the world was created and approved by love, that it subsists, coheres, and endures by love, and that, insofar as it is redeemable, it can be redeemed only by love. I believe that divine love, incarnate and indwelling in the world, summons the world always toward wholeness, which ultimately is reconciliation and atonement with God." (Wendell Berry)

It is apparent that changes of some sort are likely coming for this congregation. I don't know what all those changes will entail, how they'll impact our bonds with one another and our communities, or how they'll influence our relationship with the Lord. Those are the types of questions that won't have answers for some time. What I do know, is that whether we're talking about the Restoration Branches or Christianity as a whole, we have yet to love in the way that we are called to love. We have done a lot of good things – we've been diligent in prayer and scripture study, we've sought truth earnestly and vigorously, we've sought the will of God and forsaken much of what passes for acceptable behavior in today's world. But have we forgotten, at least at times, our most basic calling as disciples of Jesus – to love our neighbors as ourselves? Have we placed enough emphasis on the one teaching that holds more promise than any other – to love as Christ loved us?

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove the lampstand from its place. (Revelation 2:1-5)

"To be a Christian is to love the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Ephesians' passion and fervor for Christ had become cold, mechanical orthodoxy. Their doctrinal and moral purity, their undiminished zeal for the truth, and their disciplined service were no substitute for the love of Christ they had forsaken." – (John MacArthur)

Whatever we do moving forward – whether we do it collectively or individually, if we move towards radical love, we move towards Christ. If we place the love of Christ at the center of our lives, and seek to spread that love to all around us, we will have made the right decision and adhered to the calling and the will of God. We must once again remember our first love, our first calling, and give it its proper place in our ministry. We must allow our love to reach to limits that make us uncomfortable, that cause new and challenging questions to arise in our minds, that change the way we see one another and the way we see the world around us. It must grow to the point of revelation, generating within us newer and brighter understandings of who God is, and what He cares about most. I challenge each of you to embrace the unknown, and to seek

to understand before being understood. As the good Samaritan teaches us, the doer of God's will is not always the most obvious candidate, and we should not dismiss the idea that we may find ourselves in the shoes of the Priest or Levite, while the ones we despise may be walking the path of the good neighbor. That, in and of itself, should be enough to humble ourselves into love for one another, no matter our differences.

As I stated already, I am at a point in which I yearn for practical, real world examples of Gospel truths. Though I can certainly grasp the story of the good Samaritan, I can more easily grasp the examples of love, neighborliness, and community that occur in my own time and my own life, right in front of my eyes.

These past couple of weeks, most of my time has been spent on constructing a new hoop building for my pigs to live in after weaning. This has been an ongoing source of simultaneous frustration and excitement. Knowing that the work would be made easier with the use of a skid loader, a "neighbor" of ours offered to let me borrow his. I knew that he used his machine often, perhaps even daily, to make his own life and work easier on his farm, and so I felt guilty about taking it away from his disposal for an extended period of time. He was adamant, however, that I keep it and use it for as long as needed, and expected nothing in return. In fact, he was obviously upset at the fact that I had dared to re-fill the fuel tank before returning it to him a few days ago, feeling as though that was too high a price for me to pay for the use of a skid steer that saved me hours of work had I not had it.

This man is a member of the Community of Christ, and has been for a long time. Growing up, I attended the same congregation as he and his family for a number of years. We shared meals almost every Sunday afternoon after church. He's fully aware that I essentially renounced the COC by choosing to attend a Restoration branch these last 5 or 6 years. His wife is a member of the priesthood, as is his daughter. There is certainly the potential for hard feelings to be harbored in my direction. There could easily be feelings of abandonment or fears that I cast judgement on him and his family for their paths of worship vs. my own. None of that has ever played out. He and his wife have been perfect examples of Christ's love and neighborly love in my life for years – whether we worship together or not. He is the good Samaritan in this story, not me. His wife and his daughter have shown me love and support every time we talk. Whether you believe in their priesthood authority or not, I believe that their salvation is secure in the love that they demonstrate for others, and which stems from their love of Christ.

The other day, I had a cow learn that it could jump over the electric fence. Once that habits starts, there's really no stopping it. Having looked all across the farm for an hour in an attempt to track her down, I finally pulled in to my Amish neighbor's driveway, and asked if they'd seen any sign of her. At the time, they hadn't, but he assured me they'd send all the kids out to look (which was a significant force). Within the next hour, he came up my drive in his buggy, and informed me that he had tracked down my heifer and had her penned up in the barn. When I went to pick her up, he made mention of the hoop barn that he noticed I had been building. After having spent his morning tracking down my heifer and catching her in the barn, without hesitation he directly offered his own help and supplies, along with the help of his grown sons, should I need them when the time came to pull the massive tarp over the top of that hoop building. I am sure that the any idea of recompense never even crossed his mind.

When I told him that I was genuinely appreciative of all his help with my heifer, and for his offer to help with my construction project, he simply replied, "That's what we're here for, to help each other out." I will never forget that line, nor the way he said it. It wasn't an act, and he meant it with all of his heart. Yet



again, here was an example of a good Samaritan in my life. We worship in vastly different ways, and I am sure we believe in different doctrines and principles. But we love one another, and he demonstrated that neighborly love to me without any thought of my worthiness or merit. He did it because the love of God is in him, and he, too, I am sure, can rest easy in his assurance of salvation.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:7-11)

I don't know yet if I've really said what I've intended to say. If not, I'll keep on trying. Perhaps not by way of sermons, but in my daily living. I intend to spend some time on Sundays demonstrating my love for those around me by joining them in worship services in their congregations. I intend to enact neighborly love by giving what little support I have to offer whenever possible to those around me, with no strings attached. I hope to be able to show my love for others not by attempting to convert them to my way of thinking, but by seeking to better understand and appreciate their own beliefs and actions. Perhaps I'll die and the Lord will ask me why I did not spend more time trying to convince people to go to the right church. Maybe He'll scold me for not standing up and calling out others for their insufficient means of baptism, their open communions, and their unauthorized priesthood. He may say that I was not as strict in calling out sin as I should have been. He may reprimand me for not being more vocal to society about who should or shouldn't be able to marry, what they should or shouldn't drink, how they should vote, or how they should be spending their Sunday mornings. However, I find it far more likely that, when I stand before my King, He will simply ask me, "Why couldn't you have loved more fully and completely?"

"I am not in charge of this House, and never will be. I have no say about who is in and who is out. I do not get to make the rules. Like Job, I was nowhere when God laid the foundations of the earth. I cannot... loose the cords of Orion. I do not even know when the mountain goats give birth, much less the ordinances of the heavens. I am a guest here, charged with serving other guests – even those who present themselves as my enemies. I am allowed to resist them, but as long as I trust in one God who made us all, I cannot act as if they are no kin to me. There is only one House. Human beings will either learn to live in it together or we will not survive to hear its sigh of relief when our numbered days are done." (Barbara Brown Taylor)

"Love, sooner or later, forces us out of time... of all that we feel and do, all the virtues and all the sins, love alone crowds us at last over the edge of the world. For love is always more than a little strange here... it is in the world, but is not altogether of it. It is of eternity. It takes us there when it most holds us here." (Wendell Berry)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.

The Church Will Fail You Every Time ***Elder Michael Jordison*** ***June 13, 2021***

Good morning, everyone and you out there in Zoomland as well. For a scripture reading this morning I'd like to share Psalm 121. I don't know if any of you have heard of J.R. Church's book [The Hidden Prophecies in the Psalms](#). The premise is that there is a correlation between the year so this would be 2021 and it would correlate with prophecies in Psalm 121. I have no special knowledge or insight whether there is any thing to the Psalm correlating to the year.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber. The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.

I trust that the Lord will add His blessing to what I share with you this morning because I feel like He has placed some things upon my heart. I started out with 30 pages of notes and I have them down to half. One thing I have learned is that the older I get the more pages I end up in my notes but I have decided that that's because the font is bigger.

Let me just start out by saying that I love you. I love this branch. I love these people and I consider you all family whether you have been here for a month or whether you've been here for 30 years or longer and whether I have known you for that long. I love you. It's especially good to see these little ones here in the front. It's their vitality that we need in this branch and in the church. It's good to see you in Kenya as well and out there in Zoomland.

I want to start out by saying that when Joel and I were elected co-pastors I kind of wondered how that was going to work. I don't know if it is working or not. I guess you will be the judge of that. I didn't feel adequately prepared to be a pastor. I didn't feel like that was necessarily my strong point or something that I would just gravitate towards. I've always viewed pastoral care as one of strong leadership and a position where you meet the needs of the congregation as a shepherd but you also are there to quiet any problems and to take care of any issues and make sure that there is no dissension or contention, any trouble like that. I was pretty sure that I couldn't do it and I'm pretty sure that I can't do that to the degree that I would desire and that I would expect out of myself.

Back in January I shared that I felt that our congregation was at a crossroad. I suppose you could say that we are always at a crossroad. We're always at a place of decision where we have to make some choices about what our next step is going to be. In regard to our congregation I felt like we were at a spiritual crossroad and I still feel that we are. That we have some choices to make as a branch, how we're going to conduct ourselves and how to continue on in this ministry that we feel called and expected to do and to maintain.

Maybe you guys aren't struggling the way that I am but I feel like the ministry isn't where it should be. Maybe I feel that way as a pastor more heavily than I would otherwise. I suppose that is typical or normal. I just want you to know that I really struggled about being pastor. We've been told to wait upon the Lord and



waiting is not just maintaining and waiting for something to happen. I think waiting is actually to serve the Lord.

I had to ask myself this question. Did the Lord Jesus ask His church to maintain, to just bide our time and just continue to do the things that we are always doing? Or, did He say this, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach my gospel baptizing unto repentance and adding to the church daily such as should be saved.’ If we were to compare our growth in the branch or in the church to our retirement investment, how would it compare do you think? Are we growing at a 1%, 2% 1/2% spiritual level? Would we be satisfied if our retirement savings were built up with those values? I don’t think so. I’m getting to the point where I am starting to think about retiring and the money that I’m putting away and I’m thinking I need to have a little better rate of return on my money. The parable of the sower talked about increases of 30, 60 and 100 fold. Are we growing at a 30, 60 or 100 fold percent rate?

As I thought about our congregation and our spiritual condition, where we are and where we need to be, I’m forced to ask myself am I doing enough to fulfill the expectations, not that I’ve placed upon myself or the branch, but what the Lord expects out of us? I think that some honest introspection on all of our parts is important.

If you are like me and you think that maybe we have some room for growth, maybe we haven’t been doing the things in the way that we want to. Whose fault is that? Is it the pastors? Is it the priesthood? Is it our parents? Is it the government, the schools or is it something else all together? Well, the short answer, in my opinion, is that it is your fault and it’s my fault too. I think it is all of our fault’s. We all share in the spiritual growth or lack thereof of our branch.

With that in mind, let me ask the question. How many of you came to church this morning? Who joined Zoom? I see several hands out there and on Zoom. Well, I think that is a big part of our problem right there, that we come to church and we bring our children to church.

The Lord gave me a message a while back. I’ve shared part of it but the second part I haven’t shared. It was just a simple phrase: the church will fail you every time. When I heard that I was a little bit perplexed because this branch has sustained us. It has helped to cultivate and nourish our children. It’s strengthened my wife and me. We have come to know the gospel. We have come to know Jesus Christ partly through the ministry of this branch and this church. So to think that the church was going to fail me every time didn’t seem quite right. I feel like the Lord opened up my understanding to accept why this would be the case.

Here’s the crux. We can look at what the scriptures define as the church. Mosiah chapter 11 gives a very clear definition about this in verse 129. *For behold, this is my church: whosoever is baptized, shall be baptized unto repentance.* We find that also in the Doctrine and Covenants. He says, *Behold, this is my doctrine: Whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church.* (D & C 3:16a) Again the words of Nephi from the Book of Mormon say, *Nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth.* (1st Nephi 3:227)

As I looked through the scriptures in a quick search for “church,” I found that when Jesus talked about the church He was never talking about a structure or a building. He was always talking about people. He was talking about the souls of those to whom He was ministering. We don’t go to church. The building isn’t “the church.” We don’t attend church. Jesus didn’t commission His disciples to erect any structures at least that I recall in the scriptures. I never saw that at all. We are the church. Though we call this building a church, it’s not that. All it is a structure with four walls and a roof where we gather to worship. I know that you already understand this but I don’t believe that we really take into

consideration what this means for us and why we need to have this kind of understanding of church foremost in our minds as we assemble, as we minister and as we conduct and live our lives.

The church is Christ’s bride taken from His side and made to be a perfect companion for Him because it is of Him, a part of Him. On Sundays the church comes to this building and on Monday the church goes to work or goes to school or goes out on the farm. On Tuesday it goes somewhere else and on Wednesday it happens to gather back again as we come to prayer service, etc. Then the next Sunday we roll around and again the church comes back to this building.

As I looked at the Restoration over the years, I see that we’ve made the building and the things inside it way more important than the people that come or rather the people that don’t come. There’s not very many people here and though we have a few extra on the internet, there’s not very many of us here today. I think we’ve made the building in a certain respect more important than our families and our own children, certainly more important than the people of our communities who still don’t know the fullness of the gospel. We bring people to church but we never truly instill in them this understanding that they are the church wherever they are, and we are the church wherever we are. Because of this their testimony begins to wane as soon as they leave these premises. They go off to college or school. The vibrancy of this building and the testimonies that they receive here tend to dull and to wane a little bit. If they had an understanding that maybe they were carrying it with them maybe that wouldn’t happen so much to our children. Shouldn’t we spend more time maintaining and building up relationships with Christ than updating this building or concerning ourselves so much with where we gather to worship.

That’s the question that I have to ask myself. What am I doing in response to that question? The influence of the building and its fellowship are not strong enough to keep our children safe when the storms come. When the wind picks up and the waves grow, it’s much easier to stay or hop back in the boat where the world would have us. It’s like the picture on the front of our bulletin. It takes a special individual to hop out on the waves and to walk on the water and trust in the Lord. It’s a lot safer in the boat or that’s what we think.

But hopefully when the storms come it’s going to be the testimony sealed in our children’s hearts and reinforced as they learn that worship and church are not reserved for them to go to on Sundays and Wednesdays but rather to be incorporated in the understanding of what they are when they become baptized unto Christ. They are part of His body which goes everywhere. While we learn of Christ and we speak of Christ and there are many marvelous things that happen inside these walls, are we the same people when we leave? Are we working to build the kingdom of God when we leave this place and enter our homes, go into our businesses and out on the farm and in the community, riding in the car? I believe that if we met as a body of believers in our homes, in our schools, in our community centers we might see those places differently than we might see them now. We might understand that we are in church when we are there and we have a responsibility to conduct ourselves and to evangelize while we are there.

Do you think our perspective might change if all around us we found ourselves reminded of the spiritual experiences that we had in that place or this place or that place over there? Why do reunion grounds hold such a special place in our hearts? Because of the experiences that we have had there, the things that we saw and heard and felt, the way that the Lord touched us. What if that was everywhere we went because we took church with us.

If we look at this building as our church then I believe we are sitting ourselves up to be disappointed. We need to understand that the people are the church but if we look to one another I think



we're going to find ourselves disappointed once again. Why because the church is made up of people and people will let you down. Paul said in Romans 3:23 *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* We know that, right? We've all been let down by people. I was drawn to this analogy of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Eve let her betrothed down by obeying the voice of the serpent. The church let her betrothed, Jesus, down but here's the lesson. Eve wasn't able to make amends for the transgression. She couldn't undue what she had already done and fix the problem once she had sinned. Likewise, the church is not able to save us from our fate, the penalty of sin. That duty is reserved for the last Adam, Jesus Christ, and for Him alone.

There have been times when I have looked to the church and been let down. There have been times when I've looked at the priesthood and I've been let down. There have been times when I have looked to the pastorate and I've been let down. There have been times that I received the ministry that I needed. That is true. But to be honest there have been many times when I have been pretty upset that more wasn't being done or that so and so didn't do such and such or they didn't say this or that or whatever the case is. I would wallow in that. For the longest time I felt wronged.

I don't know about you if you have ever felt let down by the branch or anyone in the branch. I am guessing at some point you have but I know that there are some that have been a part of our congregation that have felt that way and have left because they didn't receive what they needed. Whether that's right or wrong I don't know but that was the end result. Now we have a responsibility to meet the needs of the congregation but if we look to the church to provide for us and to save us and to meet our needs, we will be let down and it will fail us eventually.

My father, if you knew him, was pretty bitter towards the church. As I was growing up he never attended but once or twice on a special occasion. He was angry with many of the church leadership at that time and he was angry at the people all the way back to Joseph Smith, Jr.'s day. They should have done this or they should have taken care of that. He felt personally wronged for things that other people had done that did not know him. I could see myself kind of slipping into that mindset of blaming. But he was looking at the church incorrectly and I think that I have been looking at the church incorrectly.

You know we are all hypocrites and if want to look at the church through the ages, we can see that it has always failed its people at some point. If you just go back to the Restoration in 1832 they were given Section 83 where the whole church was brought under condemnation. Many of the Saints were scattered from that time forward. Then we jump to 1844 in Nauvoo. What happened again? The church was brought under condemnation and the Saints were scattered. In 1925 there was another big exodus of the church. People were looking to people or the organization to save them or to do certain things and they were disappointed and left. Again it happened in 1984. It's probably happened several other times that I have skipped over. But that's my point. The church is always going to fail us and to leave us out in the cold in some respects or at least that we feel that way.

Today we are continuing to see the church fail to fulfill its mission in meeting not only the needs of the people but also in the purpose for which it was brought forth out of the wilderness. Again, why? Because we are human and we are prone to failure, we are prone to temptation and we're imperfect. Think about this, the church was created to procreate with her husband, Jesus Christ, to procreate, to have physical flesh and spiritual rebirth in each and every person's that's brought into it. But the church isn't here to save anyone or accomplish a task not assigned to it. That's Christ's work. I want to make that abundantly clear that we are to look to Christ and not rely upon the church in any capacity other than in

finding strength through fellowship and serving Christ as we serve one another. That's why we are here, to serve one another. I used to leave thinking, 'You know I didn't get anything out of that sermon.' When I began to change my perspective and understand that maybe it's not all about me and what I get, my worship changed and the way I viewed the branch and the church changed.

Last week we took a trip to North Carolina. I say we went to North Carolina. We were right on the western edge so I don't know if that really qualifies or not but we went to the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. It is a beautiful area. We stayed on the Cherokee Indian Reservation. We had the opportunity while there to attend one of the pageants that the Cherokee nation held. It was pretty good, actually. It was a history of the Cherokee people. I probably learned this in school but I'd forgotten most of it but the Cherokee had their own language, a written language. They had their own constitution and they had a special arrangement and agreement with the US government all through our history in this nation coming forth. I was amazed at how patriotic the Cherokee were. It was quite fascinating because you think of the Native Americans being oppressed and we've heard of the Trail of Tears where the US government pushed the Cherokee nation off to Oklahoma and they had to walk. They were promised certain things which the government did not deliver. I have often thought that all of the Native Americans would have a bad taste in their mouth regarding this country but I was really surprised that I didn't see that at all with the Cherokee we were around. I didn't feel that.

As I watched that play and considered the nation of the Cherokees and how peaceful they were I was wondering, 'Lord, why would you allow them to be scattered and treated so poorly?' Why would God allow that because we believe that they are part of Israel, they are part of His chosen people? Immediately my mind was taken back to the prophecies in the Book of Mormon. There was a reason why they were scattered and smitten. We find that Lehi saw what was going to happen to his descendants, the Native Americans in this land. He writes this in 2nd Nephi 1: 16, 18, 20, 22-24. *And behold, it is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations; Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as those whom the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land; And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments, they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, (not just proper but blessed) But behold, when the time cometh that they shall dwindle in unbelief, after they have received so great blessings from the hand of the Lord;. . . If the day shall come that they will reject the Holy One of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God, behold, the judgments of him that is just, shall rest upon them; Yea, he will bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them (the Lamanites) the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten.* That's why.

In 1st Nephi 3:149-151 we have this account from the vision of Nephi. *And it came to pass that I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; And I beheld the wrath of God that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles, and were smitten. And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles; that they did prosper, and obtain the land for their inheritance. . . The Lamanites, the Cherokee, the other tribes were scattered and smitten because they did not keep the commandments of the Lord and so the conditions of their blessing were revoked.*

What bothers me is that I believe we are in the same predicament as the Lamanites. When I say "we" I mean the church and that's you and I. When Jesus spoke to the Nephites He also brought this prophesy up regarding the scattering of the Lamanites



that I just read. He said that they would be regathered but then He gave a warning to the Gentile church. He said in 3rd Nephi 9:47-48, 51-52, 66. *Ye remember that I spake unto you, and said that when the words of Isaiah should be fulfilled, behold they are written, ye have them before you; therefore search them. And verily, verily I say unto you, that when they shall be fulfilled, then is the fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people. And I say unto you, that if the Gentiles do not repent, after the blessing which they shall receive (have we not received the blessing), after they have scattered my people (have we not scattered the Lamanites), then shall ye who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, go forth among them; as a lion among the beasts of the forests, and as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he goeth through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Then He goes on and says a few verses later. Nevertheless, when they shall have received the fullness of my gospel, then if they shall harden their hearts against me, I will return their iniquities upon their own heads, saith the Father.*

This is stated many times throughout the scriptures. I am sure that you are all very much aware of it. But I hadn't really thought about it in context of the scattering of the Lamanites that we could be in danger of that very same cursing as the church having once had the knowledge. The question then is are we in danger because we are transgressing in some capacity?

The purpose of my talk with you today is not to lay out an indictment necessarily against the church. My purpose is to get you to think about what the church is, who the church is and how we should be conducting ourselves. In Doctrine & Covenants 39:3e we are told *Thou shalt preach the fullness of my gospel which I have sent forth in these last days; the covenant which I have sent forth to recover my people, which are of the house of Israel.* Part of our repentance, I believe, is fulfilling that commission. What are we doing in regards to that? Are we merely maintaining in meeting and coming to church every week or are we actively engaged in pursuing the restoration of the house of Israel in some way. Even if it's just in putting the knowledge here so that we can share with others.

Another part of our repentance is how we respond to the Spirit of God when we are baptized unto Christ. Are we changed in a way that bears fruit, not only in our lives but in our testimony that reaches out and touches and nourishes and fills other people? Or, are we just consuming it upon ourselves and it's all about me and what I get? For myself, that's where I have been many times. Again this is not an indictment, this is merely to get you to think. I think it is time for us reexamine what we are doing as a branch, what we are doing as a people, what we are doing as a body of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Now, in regard to this, this has been on my mind for some time in trying to figure out how to put it all together and not come across as negative or too preachy. Let me just say, because I know that we've had discussions on this branch and whether it should be in Mount Ayr or Lamoni or somewhere else or we should do this or we should do that. This is not really in regard to that at all. I told Joel awhile back, in talking about moving to Lamoni for instance, that if we were going to go to Lamoni and do the same thing we are doing now, what's the point? There is no point. Something needs to change within us first before we ever figure we are going to do something somewhere else.

As I have been considering these things and wrestling with whether I should share them, Josh actually brought me a copy of a letter that he had gotten from a family member. He just gave it to me a couple of days ago. Normally, I would not share something that is in a personal letter that I didn't get permission to but at the end of the letter, he says that he's willing to talk to any branch or anybody about these things so I am going to take a few liberties

here. This comes from a letter that Brother Neil Simmons wrote back in 2016, and it really resonated with me because as I have been pondering these things. He just went right down the road where I had been thinking for some time.

I just want to share a little bit here. He lays out what he considers 12 points that he sees wrong in our branches. Now, I don't know if you agree with Neil or if you like him. It doesn't really matter. I agree with Neil on many things and I disagree with him on many things as well. That's irrelevant. Let me ask you to consider these things and see if you can find some merit in what he is saying with this list of failings in our local branches.

1) Half of our baptized membership is inactive. (I'd say probably more than half maybe.)

2) One-third or more of our ordained priesthood are inactive.

3) Studies show that members of the church that have been in Sunday school for more than 10 years cannot pass a simple test of knowledge about the restoration gospel.

4) Most active church members attend church out of duty rather than out of an abundance of spiritual conviction. (I've been guilty of that from time to time.)

5) Most restoration sermons are boring, poorly delivered with very little spiritual content. (Maybe this is one of them.)

6) Spiritual expressions in the branch worship services are rare and often disbelieved by members and priesthood when offered. (I don't know if I would say that we fall into that category.)

7) Wednesday night prayer services are poorly attended and rarely offer true spiritual blessings to those who attend. (Maybe at times.)

8) Branches generally baptize only natural increase but only rarely baptize new members. (I would say we have to agree with that.)

9) Priesthood who go out of their way to bring in new contacts to church are usually regarded with some discomfort by the leadership. (I don't think we have a problem with that.)

10) Ordinances performed in the branch are usually devoid of spiritual content especially the sacrament service which is the most routine of the ordinances.

11) Children of active members drop out of church about college-age. (That happens everywhere.)

12) Active and devoted church members are frequently drawn into arguments about church organization. They take sides leading to disaffection of one or both sides. (We see that ALL over the place.)

13) Neither branch leaders nor members have any idea how to build Zion or evangelize locally.

I don't know what you think about those. I think he does a pretty good job of laying out some of the problems that we have. Maybe not specifically all of them here but certainly within the church at large.

He sums up here and says, "The question becomes is the building of a branch house of worship essential to the onward progress of the general work? Notice the general work is different from local convenience. So the question is can the church grow or even exist without buildings. Again, this has nothing to do with wherever we are found as a branch. He says that the church can grow without buildings or houses of worship as was the case when the brother of Jesus, James, Peter and the other apostles grew the church from Pentecost until about 312 A.D. when it became legal to have buildings where the Christians could gather. By then Christianity had become ubiquitous throughout the Roman Empire. All achieved WITHOUT building houses of worship. Likewise the Restoration of 1830 grew from its founding 6 members to more than 100,000 members in the first seven years and it only had the Kirtland Temple as the single house of worship during that time. (I



didn't realize that.) During the next seven years the church doubled its membership again to 200,000 even though it had left Kirtland's house of prayer and never finished another temple in either Nauvoo or Far West.

He says I am not opposed to church buildings for worship but let me be clear by saying we have poured our ministries into our buildings so that our members are taught to go to church (That's exactly what the Lord told me.) instead of being taught that they ARE the church wherever they are and whenever two or three are met together and because we make the building the center of ministry and require the membership to attend the services in the building to receive that ministry, we defeat the quorum structures of the priesthood and the standing ministry. (Remember they were told to go to the homes of the Saints.)

Therefore, the church fails the members who do not attend the building because the priesthood currently only functions under the branch president and his branch organization and to those that come within these walls. He believes that they function under his direction. He determines their ministry within the branch and that it's largely to the members of that branch within the building in the form of prayers, some ordinances, teaching and preaching.

Honesty should compel us to admit that more than half of the baptized membership are inactive meaning they do not attend services at the branch building and when half of the committed fail to support the current system, he says it's time to reexamine the system. The scriptural system for governance within the church was originally designed by the Lord as a system of quorum units but not branch building units and the current organization with its departments is undeniably copied from the Protestant format as is the pattern of our Sunday morning format or service.

In essence he is saying that we follow the same basic service structure as any other church so it's not any wonder why we're seeing the same kinds of problems that we see in other denominations within our own church and we see it splintering and fracturing and our kids runnings off and losing their faith. Sometimes they come back. Sometimes they don't.

Let me ask you this, brothers and sisters, if this building were to burn tomorrow what would we do? Would we be scattered? Would this congregation divide? Would the people in Mount Ayr do something in Mount Ayr? Would the people in Lamoni do something in Lamoni? Would the people in Bethany do something in Bethany? Would we erect another building here? I am not asking that question because I am looking for an answer. I am asking that question because I wonder and I am challenged to consider how connected we are spiritually in our mission to fulfill the commission that we've been given as a branch to meet the needs of each and every member. By member I don't mean those of us that just sit in this building. There are a lot of us that are baptized that are out there somewhere doing something else right now. I have to say that I don't feel like we've done our part to leave the 99 and find the 1. Now the 99 are all pretty important too aren't they but so is the 1.

Brother Joel is going to share with us next week. I don't know what he is going to share but I wanted to talk this morning and to let you know that I feel like church is so much more than a location, so much more than a building. It's so much more than the construct that we have in our minds of this organizational structure. It's the body of Christ and when one part of the body suffers the whole body suffers. For too long we have neglected parts of the body and so maybe we can put our energy and our focus into restoring those parts of the body that have been lost or hurt or have been broken. Once we've done that I think then the Lord can energize us. He can motivate us and He can provide new paths, open up new paths of ministry where we can go and we can see

clearing those paths and be careful to not divide over things that are really inconsequential in the long run.

I hope this means something to you. If not you can tell me afterwards because that's another thing I have learned as a pastor. This is the complaint department as well. Again, let me reiterate I love you all and I feel privileged to serve and to worship with you and I hope that we will continue to do that for many days and years to come.

The Importance of Remembering Your Covenant And The Grace Of God Deacon Joshua Jordison July 4, 2021

As today is Independence Day, it seems like the topic of speaking has already been chosen for me. I think I have read our scriptures enough that I could probably pull something to talk about this nation and the covenants, but that is not my intent. I realize that some people might miss something because this is a wonderful day that we celebrate the birth of our country.

Just as this land is a covenant land whether you know it or not, with promises and judgments that face it, today you are also remembering a covenant that you have made, or most of you have made, with God. This also has promises and judgments with it. That is a very significant thing. And that is what I would like to talk to you about.

A lot of people in this country and probably in this world would consider themselves Christians. They may not really practice or follow Christianity, but if you press them enough, they might say they are Christian. It's what their parents did. It's what they were brought up with. It doesn't really matter that they don't practice it, but they could be considered Christian. We understand from the scriptures that calling yourself a Christian is a serious thing. It's not something that is taken lightly. Being a Christian is about taking the name of Christ and placing it on yourself.

When we look at the communion prayers, they are a pretty significant thing with no wasted words. I hope that when we come to the time that they are read that you will really listen to them and read them from your scriptures if you have them. In the prayers we find that by taking of the communion we are showing that we are going to remember Christ. We are remembering the covenant of baptism that we have taken

Moroni says that only those who are worthy of being baptized had to confess their sins and show that their hearts were changed. I don't remember if I knew that when I was baptized at 10 years old. I didn't want to be baptized at 8 because I couldn't stand going in front of people. It had nothing to do with the covenant or whether I was going to follow Christ, I could not stand going up in front of people and have them watch me. That's all I was thinking about. Nonetheless, baptism is a serious thing. Moroni says in Moroni 6:2-3, *neither did they receive any unto baptism, save they came forth with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and witnessed unto the church that they truly repented of all their sins. And none were received unto baptism, save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to*



serve him to the end. It's not a light covenant. By going down into the water, you are saying that you will bear His name and serve Him to the end!

This morning we are going to partake of the emblems, and we find that we have that as a remission of sins, to remember Christ and the sacrifice He made, the blood He spilled for us. If you are like me, sometimes you take the emblems and think, 'I'm going to change. I'm going to be different. I'm not going to have these sins on me anymore.' Maybe even that day or a day later or the end of the week you find yourself sinning again. Dang it! I thought I was changed. I thought my heart had been given over to the Lord and I would not sin any more. But we are fallen people. Adam was placed in the Garden to be protector of it, and to serve with God, but he failed and man fell.

The Mosaic law was given to point people towards Christ. It's had 613 rules that had to be followed. But even Moses himself knew that the Israelites could not keep it. They couldn't do all those things. We are fallen people who will continue to sin. It's really hard sometimes but the thing is the Lord knew it and that is why the plan of salvation was made. It was made even before Adam was placed on the earth and it was made even before this earth had form. There was a plan of salvation and that plan was Jesus Christ who would come and die for our sins.

We find Jacob speaking to the people in 2nd Nephi. *For it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him. For as death has passed upon all men, to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, And the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; And the fall came by reason of transgression; And because man became fallen, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord; Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement.* (2nd Nephi 6:10-15) We can't do anything to save ourselves. There is nothing that you can truly do to actually save yourself. We know that baptism is needed to come in by the strait and narrow way and that all people will come in by Jesus Christ. It doesn't deviate. I don't know exactly what happens after one dies and how the prison house is set up. But when somebody dies without the law they'll still come unto salvation by Jesus Christ. The people who are in the prison house are going to come unto salvation by Jesus Christ. What saves all people is the final and infinite atonement made by Christ Jesus. This is the point.

In the evangelical world you have the 'saved by grace' and once you've accepted your Lord and Savior you can do whatever you please because He's covered it. (This can be termed 'cheap grace') It's as if He has said, 'Don't worry about sin. I'll just take care of it.' However, we know from the scriptures that Christ did not come to save you IN your sins but FROM your sins. *Remember after you are reconciled unto God that it is only in and through the grace of God that you are saved.* (2nd Nephi 7:42) We still need to repent, and humble ourselves before our Creator. We must continue to humble ourselves and become as a child, meek and lowly that we can seek forgiveness from Him for our sins that we continue to do even though we don't want to.

I don't know if this has happened to anybody else but sometimes you catch yourself looking at your sin and think 'Why. How did that happen?' Sin seems to be able to pop up in your life, even when you say that it won't. Great thing is that we can continue to seek for forgiveness. When we seek that forgiveness, He will offer it to us but the reason you are allowed to be saved is only through the grace of God. It is only by His blood that your sins are wiped away. You are a spotted mess living in this world. You are filled with sin but Christ's blood and the sacrifice that He made, the infinite atonement, the sacrificial lamb who was completely and utterly perfect, God Himself dying for you, Christ the individual, wipes that sin away.

The plan of the Lord of restoring the House of Israel and bringing those lost people to salvation doesn't really depend on you individually. You can be a tool for the work but whether you individually want to follow Him or not, it doesn't matter. What I decide to do doesn't really affect His plan for the words that He has spoken will come to pass. Yet Christ died just for you. If you were the only person, the only single individual in the entire human race that would turn back to God, He would have died for you. He did die for you.

Turning back to Moroni just down the way from what I read about baptism you find that the people who were baptized and a part of the Church came to be nourished by the good word. They would come to a church. They would gather together and that was to keep them in the right way and *to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith.* (Moroni 6:5) Relying ALONE on the merits of Christ. This statement is of the utmost importance. We have to rely upon Christ and what He has done for us. And with that, we can show Him our love and reliance for him by doing everything in this life for the glory of God and pointing towards Christ.

I was watching an interview with the daughter of Chick-Fil-A's founder and she was discussing the business. She said that her Dad always said that your business life had to be no different than your personal life. There was never a separation between the two. That's the same way that it should be in your life. There is no separation between what you believe in the Scriptures, your spiritual life, and what you believe in the world. When you leave this building you don't become a new person. When you hang out with somebody you don't change yourself. You are the same person in your spiritual life as you are in your personal life. You remember the covenant which you made, to bear His name and serve Him to the end. This doesn't always happen though. In fact, I think that we kind of need a change of heart. We don't take His sacrifice seriously and we don't take THIS (communion) seriously.

If I was to ask many individuals, I can guarantee you that many of you would say that you do prepare to partake of these emblems. You do take time and that's probably true. I have taken time on communion Sundays but more often than not I don't really genuinely know what I'm doing. I don't really prepare myself to take of the emblems. Last month I didn't partake of the emblems because I kept thinking, 'You just have things going on. I just wasn't happy.' I was not in the right frame of mind to take them. There have been many



times where I've set down in 'my spot' and right before the emblems are partaken, I quickly say a prayer of repentance, quickly to clear my sins so that I am worthy to partake of them. It's as though in my life for the month leading up to communion I don't think about this time. I don't really think about my covenant that I have made. But at this time, I need to quickly remember it so I can take the emblems and I don't have to pass on them. That's not the way to live.

For those of you who are baptized you said that you would follow Christ. You took His name upon you. You said you would be Christians. Again, it turns back to the grace of God. We're relying upon His merits because we do sin but it is by the grace of God that we are forgiven. Paul tells us to lay down our sins and become new people. That is what we need to do. You will continue to sin even if you feel something now or later and you really want to change, you'll sin again. It's sad but that's what enduring to the end means. It's walking up that mountain and the wind is blowing on you and you keep pressing forward. You get to a point where you think, 'O great. Look at how much progress I've made' and then you slip down again. Enduring to the end isn't sitting there and going 'Well, I've sinned and there's no forgiveness.' Or, 'I can't ever reach the top.' But it's about pressing forward and following Christ.

A change of heart is what we really speak of when we say doing good works. I don't believe that every little thing in life that you do is going to come back on you. That might be a bit of a change from some of the traditional doctrine, but I don't believe that there is a book with every good thing and every bad thing that you have done in your life to be added together to see if you can be saved. Good works do play a part in the story, but it is where those good works come from. There are a lot of people who do good things but they have no interest in Christ or His salvation. They may feel that as long as they are just good people it will all work out in the end. But a change of heart and turning towards Christ is what makes you want to do those good things. A change of heart is often spoken of in the Book of Mormon and you find that by turning toward Christ you have a change of heart and you do good works but if you don't your works are of the devil. I hope that today that you will have a change of heart and you will remember your covenant. That you will lay down your sins and put that burden on Christ because He is there for you.

A testimony that I read not too long ago has stuck with me. It was a testimony from Louise Clark Gregson. If you don't know Louise, she is 99 now. She has been a faithful follower of Christ. She's had an eventful life. She has released two volumes of her testimonies and she is working on a third. Her first volume did not go too well with her family. I don't know the details but I know that she had some difficulties. She is a lady who is truly seeking to be rid of her sins and she is writing her testimonies and her memoirs before she passes.

In 1967 she was at a reunion in Lamoni. She was working at the Commons and during this reunion she prayed a quick prayer that she would understand the love of Christ and then she didn't think much of it after that. One morning as she got out of bed and looked out her window a vision appeared before her. She was staring out at the vast expanse

of the Pacific Ocean. It is deep, vast and expansive and continues on for millions of square miles. This was the love of God. That's what it was. It's all encompassing. He died for you and hopes that you will follow Him, that you will change the way you live and seek after Him. He died not so you could come to a Sunday service every week and expect to be filled but He died so that you could be brought unto salvation and help others reach the same goal. Being a Christian isn't about participating from 9:00-12:00 am on Sundays and from 5:30-7:30 pm on Sunday evenings and from 7:00-8:10, hopefully not over 8:10 on Wednesday evenings because you have your other life. It's about living every single moment of your life for Christ. It's a hard thing to do. It's often said that God doesn't give you anything that you can't handle as though you can bear everything. That's not true. There are things in this world that will happen to you and have happened to you for the full purpose that you will seek His help and in certain situations even return to Him.

The Book of Mormon speaks of pestilence, fire and bloodshed as ways to turn a people unto repentance. Most of the afflicted people couldn't do anything themselves to save themselves, but when they turned back to the Holy One of Israel they were saved. They were saved because they remembered their Lord their God. It was because they remembered the covenant that they made.

I would like to leave you with one more thing. It is to point you towards Christ. It is to point you towards repentance, humility and meekness, to take your covenant of baptism seriously, to take these emblems seriously. When you partake of them they don't go into your body and have a chemical reaction that's special that will go into your mind and do some weird things and that's what makes you forgiven. It is a remembrance of Christ's body and His blood for taking all the sins of the world, all of your sins upon Himself, bearing those marks. If He's doing that for you will you remember what you were supposed to do?

I will leave you with these words from Moroni. *Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in no wise deny the power of God. And again, if ye, by the grace of God, are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father, unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy without spot.* (Moroni 10:29-30) No one can enter the Kingdom of God with even the least bit of sin on you and that sin has to come off by the blood of Christ. One day there will come a time when you won't sin any more but you will be perfected in Christ and not have to worry. Your body that has been cleansed of your sin will be wrapped in a robe of righteousness. Today is not that day but the day when we can hope for it and pray for it and remember the covenant that we have made.



Divine Appointments

Elder Christopher Pedersen

September 12, 2021

Tony Crandell used Doctrine & Covenants 68:1d as a Call to Worship, *behold, this is the promise of the Lord unto you, O ye my servants: wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I, the Lord, am with you and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God, that I was, that I am, and that I am to come.*

I would like to read from Alma 16 beginning with verse 218 and I'd like to change one word because of the audience, because of who we are today. I want to use "continue" if you'll listen for that minor change. *Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may [continue] to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you; yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save; Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him; cry unto him when ye are in your fields; yea, over all your flocks; cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening; yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies; yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness. Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them: cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase. But this is not all: ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness; Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you. (Alma 16:218-222)*

I have a topic I'd like to discuss this morning. I usually don't do topics because I'm just not that organized. It's a flaw that I have. It's also a gift because I find that a lot of people learn like I do. They think like I do and usually there is a way that we can all relate especially when it comes to the gospel. I did name this topic and it is "Divine Appointments." I wanted to discuss those today and I would like to begin with a story about Grace and I. I'd like to share with you how we met and how we came to be in the place that we are today.

We both attended church camps regularly. I did my whole life but she mostly from junior high through high school. My parents directed camps and they were always involved so I was, by default, always as part of those. One summer my brother went to a leadership camp. It's a bunch of high schoolers who get together and learn leadership skills but they are a part of a junior high camp so they are half staff and half camper at this camp as well. Grace was a part of that leadership camp. She met my younger brother, Benjie, and they became friends. Grace had a friend named Elyse and Grace and Elyse were kind of synonymous. If you talked about Grace you would talk about Elyse so Benjie came home talking about his new friends, Grace and Elyse. It meant nothing to me except it was two girls that Benjie met. I was proud of him because he had actually talked to girls. I couldn't do that when I was his age so I was just amazed.

A few weeks later at a senior high camp I met Grace and Elyse. At that moment they were just friends. Apparently though this was a "divine appointment." Here we are today married. I think it was at that camp that Grace went home and told her mom, 'I met the man I'm going to marry.' Her mom wanted her to date. Grace said, 'Nope, I'm not going to do it.' She had met me and the search was over I guess. It took several years for me to figure that out but more "divine appointments" were to come into play just for this particular relationship.

After I graduated from high school I had several things that happened to me that caused me to turn to the Lord. I was having some struggles spiritually trying to figure out my path in life. I won't go into those but in regards to Grace I did go to a senior high camp after I graduated as a C.I.T. That was a "divine appointment" for many reasons. I happened to talk to a young lady who I was interested in, and it wasn't Grace, who was going to that camp. She suggested that I go to this camp and so I went.

We were sitting at campfire one day and all the campers had left. I was just hanging around with the staff and this girl who I was interested in came and sat on my knee and wanted to talk. I realized in that moment that I needed her to get away from me because I had feelings for this "Grace" girl now that had happened during that camp. I kind of moved around to where she got the hint and she left and I ended up asking Grace to date me which was a huge, huge step for this guy.

I thought I was at that camp to draw closer to the Lord. How many of you have had your wisdom teeth pulled? Mine are still here. They don't give me any problems. I do believe I have a crowded mouth and probably should get them taken out at some point but it just never happened for me. It wasn't a huge issue except at this camp. Those teeth would come up and then they would retract. I don't know how far but it would create a little hole in the back of my mouth. So I am at this camp and Raisin Bran is my cereal of choice. It has to be 2% milk or else it doesn't taste right. I am eating this Raisin Bran and a flake gets broken off in my right side here back in the hole. It was very painful. It sounds stupid but I went to the camp director and told him that I was going home if I couldn't get the flake out. I had picked at it with a fork and toothpicks and my fingernail, anything that I could think of to reach back there and get that flake out. It would not come out. Nothing worked to dislodge this flake. The camp director said, 'Let's administer to you.' He grabbed the pastor and we went over to the tabernacle at Odessa Hills Campground and they laid their hands on my head. The first prayer was offered but in the middle of the second prayer, guess what happened? That flake popped out and, of course, I spit it out in the middle of the prayer. I wasn't going to swallow it because I didn't want to have to tell Elyse (Jordison) about that someday.

I thought, 'wow, this is powerful.' The Lord had healed me and I got to stay at camp. "Divine appointment" right? That appointment where that young woman invited me to this camp had now turned into an opportunity where I, looking back, met my wife and had a bran flake dislodged from my mouth. But that wasn't it. One of the men came to me and said, 'I have to talk to you. I was taken in a vision



and the Lord saw you where you are and he showed me that you were in the midst of darkness.' I thought, 'Oh, no he's seen all my sin.' He went on to illustrate what had happened when he said me. 'There was a little bit of a dim light around you and you had ahold of the Rod of Iron.' What the man didn't know was that the Lord had led me, prior to that camp, to start getting into the scriptures again and to start leaning on Him and start talking to Him. So the Lord showed Steve that I had ahold of the Rod of Iron. It was encouraging to me. It was the Lord saying, 'Continue on the path that you are on.' He said those words to continue to cling to the Rod of Iron, to study the word, to pursue the Lord and He would direct all of my ways.

One of the questions on my heart was a call to the office of priest. The pastor, as they always do, had come and said, 'You have a call to the office of priest.' For three weeks I fasted and prayed about this thing and the other man came to me and said, 'I'm not supposed to do this because we don't want to plant seeds and interfere with what the Spirit is doing in a person's life but I am so compelled to tell you that the Lord told me that you have a call to the office of priest.' "Divine appointment"

I thought that I was sitting down with a young woman that I wanted to date and was interested in and I thought, 'Wow, we get to have a conversation' and lo and behold the Lord had a completely different path charted for my life. All of those directions had choices. When I say "divine appointments," Grace and I have an ongoing disagreement. I think we're kind of on the same page now but it's more about words and how you use words and how people hear words. This disagreement is, does the Lord identify one individual for you to marry and that's it and you are destined for that person. I happen to believe that God is in the introduction process because we make choices. I take wrong paths all the time and somehow I wandered into Grace. I believe I chose her. I think that is more romantic to say that I chose her but the point is that God creates "divine appointments" and how do you respond to these "divine appointments?"

I want to share another "divine appointment" that's not related to me. I am going to share many of these this morning and I hope that they register with you and you can find within your life some of these "divine appointments" that have taken place and then look into the not to distant future to see the "divine appointments" that God has set up for you and how we can respond in these moments.

Yesterday we didn't celebrate we commemorated the 20th anniversary of September 11th. It's been 20 years since we sat and watched the news in horror on that day. Several of us in this room weren't even born. It's just ancient history to you and you read only and hear only what your parents or teachers or friends or people behind the pulpit will share with you.

How many of you have heard the story of the man with the red bandana? The guy's name is Welles Crowther. When he was young he had a "divine appointment" with his father. When he was 10 or 11 years old his father sat him down. He had a suit coat on and he folded a napkin or hanky and stuck it in his pocket and said, 'This is for show.' Then he had a red handkerchief. You know the kind with the

design on it. He handed it to him kind of folded and said, 'Put this in your pocket. This is for you to blow.' So whenever you have to blow your nose you use the red bandana but the other one is to look good. For the rest of his life Welles used the red bandana. He could be seen around town riding his bike with it hanging out of his pocket. Welles went to college and became a very good lacrosse player. He always wore the red bandana when he played. Before his helmet went on the red bandana was the last thing. He always performed with the red bandana.

He graduated college. I forget what his degree was in but he worked in the World Trade Centers as some kind of financial guy. He had a great job, a great retirement plan. He had great insurance. He had everything that you would think that an individual like that would want. He wore a suit every day to work. He was working in a high rise and had beautiful views. Everything was going his way. He called his father one day just a few weeks before September 11th and said, 'You know what? I think I'm going to quit.' His dad said, 'Well, what are you going to do?' He said, 'I think I want to be a firefighter.' What a change for this guy but let's talk about some "divine appointments."

So we know what happened. Planes flew into the towers on September 11th early in the morning just as the day was getting started. What about "divine appointments" on September 11th? Do you realize that there should have been about 80,000 people in those towers that day. Recognize today that there were only about 4000 to 6000 people there. There were so many less than what could have been killed. The planes flew into the towers and less than an hour later both of the towers were on the ground and the people that were inside perished. That day 2,747 people lost their lives through the various attacks but the man with the red bandana disappeared and his remains were never found. His mother would read whatever she could about that day hoping to find some hint, some glimpse of her son. She read this article about a woman who I believe was on the 72nd floor who survived. She started to talk about the events that led to her escaping. One of her co-workers, colleagues or some man that she didn't recognize had on a red bandana and was speaking with authority as if he knew. Welles was a volunteer firefighter at the fire department when he was growing up. He hung around the fire station. He had on a red bandana. My guess is the way it was described it was around his face probably to help him not breathe in the toxic fumes.

She went on and read the article and there were others who mentioned the man with the red bandana. She said, 'That's my son.' She tracked those people down and she heard their testimony and asked them to describe this man in the red bandana and sure enough it was her son. How many lives the man saved that day who knows but he had a "divine appointment." What if the father had not set his son down and spoke things to him that the little boy needed to hear, things that would carry him into manhood. Some things you do because you want to show you're in control because people need to be able to trust you but then there are other things you do that you don't need to show people. Like the red bandana you pull out of your back pocket, you blow your nose and then it goes back in your back pocket. What if the father had not taken the moment to sit down with his son and



share those things. We never would have heard the story or been inspired by the man in the red bandana.

When I was twelve years old our family attended Buckner Restoration Branch, a huge branch. I think it was huge. I was twelve to thirteen years and I'm pretty sure there were 300 to 400 people that would show up every Sunday. That's a big congregation wouldn't you agree? Both of our congregations, your's and mine, are about the same size. We have about 30 to 40 people maybe. It looks like your attendance here is similar. Buckner had this huge foyer. They built it that way because they wanted the sanctuary to be a solemn, quiet, reverent place. In order to do so you had to give the chatter day saints an opportunity to find somewhere where they could talk rather than the sanctuary so they built this huge foyer. It was 20 feet wide and a 150 feet long. Then there was a huge fellowship hall on the other side. There was a lot of room for people to gather and talk after the service on Sunday.

It was fun as a young boy because here I was below everybody and I could dodge in and out of the suits and look at the old lady shoes or recognize someone I needed to avoid. It was fun because you would chase your friends in and out of the saints who were gathered. You were also dodging trouble because you weren't supposed to be doing that. Even though we were fellowshiping and having fun if you wanted to run you went outside. I remember one time I was kind of chasing one of my buddies through and this old man grabbed me. I thought, 'Oh, no this is it. I am busted and when dad finds out I am really busted when I get home.' He grabbed me by my shoulder and said, 'Christopher' and then he picked my right arm up and he put his right hand in mine and he shook my hand. I sat there with my hand folded in his just limp. He keep shaking and said, 'I want you to squeeze my hand.' I kind of squeezed it and he said, 'Squeeze it harder.' I felt his grip let up just a little bit. This was a "divine appointment" and the reason it was "divine" was first by him grabbing me and getting my attention, he shook me. I thought I was in trouble and I remember this day even now. Lowell Rafferty said to me, 'You are what 12 or 13 years old?' I said, 'I'm 13.' He said, 'You're a young man now. You think you're a boy but you're a young man and let me tell you what men do. Young men shake hands and when they shake hands they squeeze tightly and they look the other man in the eye because they are not a coward or they're not afraid.' I remember these words. Why would you say that to a young man? Because the young boy needed to know. He needed somebody to call him into manhood. From that moment forward I also remembered that if I was shaking your hand I was going in as deep as your hand would let me. There was none of this sissy stuff because he wouldn't let me do that and it resonated with me. It was a "divine appointment."

There are "divine appointments" in scripture as well. I want to share some of those. You can turn to Alma 6 but I am more or less going to summarize this and then we'll go to Acts 10 and read about another "divine appointment." There is a common thread through all "divine appointments." Have you ever met somebody that you just felt like if there ever was a word like soul mate that meant something that they were it. Have you met people like that who in a moment you

clicked. It may be somebody that you are married to or that you fell in love with but a lot of times even in life even today I meet people that I love speaking to. There is a connection there and you see each other again and you didn't really miss each other but you picked up where you left off. Those are probably "divine appointments." They have purpose.

Alma is in a town and has had no success. He has knocked on doors and been in the streets and spoken to everybody about the gospel of Jesus Christ and called them to repentance and to be baptized but they have shunned him. They have run him out of town. They have gathered together a mob and said if you come back across these borders, we will kill you so Alma walked away totally discouraged. 'Lord, you told me to do this. I fasted. I've done what you've asked me. I walked into this town and I've struck out. There isn't one "divine appointment.'" Those aren't the words he used. Those are mine.

In Alma 6:19-26 it says, *It came to pass that while Alma was thus weighed down with sorrow, behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him, saying, Blessed art thou, Alma; therefore lift up thy head and rejoice, for thou hast great cause to rejoice: For thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God from the time which thou received thy first message from him. Behold, I am he that delivered it unto you; and behold, I am sent to command thee that thou return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people of the city; yea, preach unto them. (He's thinking to himself I've already done this.) Yea, say unto them, except they repent, the Lord God will destroy them. For behold, they do study at this time that they may destroy the liberty of thy people, . . . after Alma had received his message from the angel of the Lord, he returned speedily to the land of Ammonihah. And he entered the city by another way, yea, by the way which is on the south of the city of Ammonihah. (So, he's saying he entered in from the back way. They kicked him out of one way so he went around and came in the other way. That's like my dog when she doesn't want to get in trouble. She knows she can't come in this way but she's going to come in from the backside to get to her food.) And as he entered the city he was an hungered, and he said to a man, Will ye give to an humble servant of God something to eat? (Alma, perhaps, understands that this man is somebody he needs to talk to but maybe he doesn't. God is about to show us a "divine appointment.") And the man said unto him, I am a Nephite, and I know that thou art a holy prophet of God, for thou art the man whom an angel said in a vision, Thou shalt receive. So Alma came back into town the back way and came to this guy named Amulek and the man said that an angel told him that Alma was coming. He saw Alma's likeness by the angel, by revelation and now he was standing in front of him. He said that he knew Alma when he was coming down the road and he had already started preparing food for Alma.*

From this point on Alma and Amulek pressed forward preaching the gospel together, a dynamic duo unlike the scriptures have ever seen. These men preached and taught and worked with power. At one point the people were being gathered together and they were being burned at the stake. All the people that they had converted were being burned alive and Amulek said, 'Let's call down fire from heaven.'



Amulek was ready and had the power, they were equipped to do so but Alma said, ‘Brother, the spirit constrains me. We need to let the blood of these saints stand as a testimony against these who are wicked in the last day.’ It was wisdom. That was a “divine appointment.”

I’d like you to go to Acts 10. We’re going to read about a man named Cornelius. Cornelius was an Italian. He ate spaghetti. He was a centurion of a band called the Italian Band. It says in verse 2 of Acts 10 that he was a devout man with all of his house so he and his home were followers of Christ. They gave much alms to the people and they prayed to God always. Then the Lord came to him and said sometime about the 9th hour (I don’t know back then what the 9th hour is. To us it’s 9 o’clock in the morning.) An angel came unto Cornelius and called him by name. *And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.* (Acts 10:4) Reminding him of all these things that he had done.

In verse 5 it says, *And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter; He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side; he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.* (5-8) So at the 6th hour Peter goes up to his housetop to pray. However long it took these men to get there Peter is now up on his housetop to pray. That was his quiet time. Remember in the scripture that I read at the beginning it said to pray in your closet, pray in your open spaces, pray over everything. This is how Peter began his day. It sounds like the 6th hour and that could be 6 o’clock in the morning.

Peter went up to the rooftop about the 6th hour and became very hungry and would have eaten but while his servants were preparing the food, he fell into a trance. This is in verse 10. So Peter a follower of Jesus has fallen into a trance. He’s on his rooftop and now he’s basically I guess unconscious or he’s sitting there dazed. He’s in a trance. He’s lost mentally. If someone were to walk up and see him they would think he had gone mad. *And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth.* (11) I picture that he’s in this trance but he sees this sheet and the whole sky is covered. It might be a square sheet or maybe it’s one of Linda’s quilts and it comes and descends on to him. Now he’s laying on this perfectly clean sheet across the whole entire world. *Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.* (12-13) It’s breakfast time. What do you want to do when you get up? Your stomach is growling and you want to eat breakfast but Peter decided he wanted to go talk to God first. Now God is taking advantage of the hunger pangs that are in Peter and He says, ‘I want you to arise, kill and eat.’ This should tempt Peter correct? Peter should say, ‘Oh, yeah, I’m starving. That looks like a good beast to eat for breakfast. I’m going to arise and kill and eat.’ *But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or*

unclean. (14) So he is a Jew and can’t eat certain types of animals. *And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* (15) This happened three times and each time Peter said no.

So Peter is now coming out of his trance. Remember what’s happening at the same time. Men are coming to visit him which he doesn’t know. *Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate.* (17) Peter wondered about the dream he had just seen and why he had seen it. What was the Lord trying to tell him and all of a sudden there was a knock at the door. I think there was probably something in Peter that said, ‘Maybe, just maybe this is a “divine appointment.”’

Later that evening people assembled together, Jews and Gentiles alike and they all came into the room and Peter began to preach and to teach but for what purpose? These disciples and apostles amaze me because they’ve seen so many works of Jesus. They knew about Him and the woman at the well. They knew all the things that He had done and yet they still couldn’t understand the way Jesus was operating at this time. Back in those days it was just the Jews and that was it. If you weren’t a Jew you were cut off. You were left out and that’s how the Jews felt. So there are Gentiles that are dining and listening and hearing all these words that Peter has to say and all of a sudden the Holy Ghost falls upon all of them. ALL OF THEM, not just the Jews. Wow! They start to marvel within themselves holy smokes or Holy Ghost is upon all of them. They are marveling at what had just taken place and what happens with Peter at that moment? The whole day he had doubted about this vision. I promise you knowing what I know about the human mind, he was vexed at what the Lord was trying to tell him. The Holy Ghost fell on them and ‘Oh, I get it now.’ He didn’t fully get it. It took an argument with Paul before he finally got it later on but he began to understand. That was a “divine appointment.”

There are several things that we have to do to be perceptive to these “divine appointments.” We each wake up every day. One day we won’t but every day we do what is our habit? Habitually we wake up and we do our own things. You have to train your body to do certain things. I’m talking about prayer. How many of you have fallen asleep at night praying? Almost every night. It’s a good time to pray. I have spoken with people who say, ‘I feel so guilty because I’m laying down and praying.’ But it’s probably a good thing. The last person you’re talking to is God so if you died overnight you have spoken to God. If you don’t die you’ve spoken to God and He has an opportunity to help you have dreams or help you through the night. It’s a win win situation for you. You wake up in the morning. Do you ever say, ‘Lord, thank you.’ It’s difficult. I have a routine and it’s hard to get to that point because of the way my body feels in the morning. I have things I need to do before I can function in any way. We need to speak to the Lord.

When I was in Liberia at 4:30 in the morning like clockwork, no alarm went off, no nothing. It was hot and humid and we were on a full size mattress that was laid on a concrete floor and were locked in this room so that someone



(I don't know who) couldn't come in and kill me or Stephen Gardee and take what we had. But he would get up at 4 in the morning and over that metal door his voice would echo. 'Oh, Stephen, let's sleep just a little bit longer.' I didn't sleep well because it was hot but he would wake up and say, 'Lord, thank you that we are counted among the living today.' He began his day with prayer.

We should begin our day with prayer. We should begin everything we do with prayer. We come to church and why do we say an opening prayer or have an invocation? Because the first thing we should do is pray. We're teaching each other and encouraging each other to pray. Peter when he was taken into his trance had just concluded prayer. When Alma met Amulek he was at the tail end of fasting and praying. I have been out with Brother Hugh Caldwell who I know now he's actively involved in Lamoni. His ministry is knocking on doors and talking to everybody and anybody. If you get a chance to go with him it would be good for you. It builds character. He will embarrass you and he will stretch you but he is not afraid to talk to anybody. "Divine appointments"

When you put yourself around the people you're going to find "divine appointments." There was a time when we paused at this intersection in Ocoola, IA and we prayed. I was very worried. I began to understand that during that three-week period in Osceola, IA my job there was to protect Hugh from his wanderings because when he was praying to the Lord he would wander. His eyes would literally be closed in the middle of the road, head bowed and he would be wandering into the street and I would grab him and pull him back. We were perplexed. Everybody had shut the door in our faces. Nobody wanted to talk to us except for one guy. He believed that Jesus was an alien and that we were his created world. That was a fascinating conversation. We were kind of discouraged because it was a hot day. We sat at this intersection but little did we know. Hugh said I think we need to go this way. He didn't even ask me but I said, 'Well, I think we need to go this way.' So he stopped and prayed again and said, 'No, we need to go this way.' So he went left and I could have just gone the other way if I wanted. He felt compelled that we needed to go a certain direction. The next thing we know we find this guy who is in tears on his porch with his cell phone. We had several communications with him. It was a "divine appointment." It was an appointment that ministered to all the parties involved. It was an appointment that led us to others that we could discuss and talk and share the gospel with. There were many "divine appointments" that came from that one "divine appointment." What a fascinating thing.

I see my sister, Denise (Hawley) over here on Zoom. I shouldn't tell her this but Hugh and I were on your porch before you knew it and Hugh looked down and saw the name on the mail. You had your letters sitting on the mail box. It said Denise Hawley and we knew that but you didn't answer her door so we went next door and met Cheryl (Colyer). "Divine appointments"

We've been able to inspire and encourage each other but did that just happen? It happened because our brother offered a prayer and the Lord took us one direction when we could have wandered in many other directions.

The Lord's Prayer is in Matthew 6 which we read today in class. It's a great scripture. I watched a special where Todd Beemer when he was going down on Flight 93 and the terrorists were getting ready to take over the plane. Whatever its ultimate end was he said these words remember, 'Are you ready? Let's roll.' Those are his words but before he did that he prayed with an operator at Verizon and he asked her to say the Lord's Prayer with him. He knew he was going to die and in his last moments he wanted to hear the Lord's Prayer. What an amazing thing. I hate to put a title on this but I wonder if there were "divine appointments" on that plane and on other planes in other situations that took place but listen to this, *Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And suffer us not to be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.* (Matthew 6:10-15) I am going to cherry pick a passage here because it was done in class, *Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.* So all these heavenly celestial things that we look forward to the Lord is saying, 'My will is that those things be done on earth.' That's a communication from Jesus to the Father but in front of you so that you can hear that Christ is saying, 'The things that the Father has (the things that I have) are available to you.' These things can be manifest on the earth. These "divine appointments" can be manifest.

When the woman touched Christ's robe was that a "divine appointment"? Absolutely! Christ touched lepers. Were they "divine appointments"? Absolutely. The man who couldn't get to the water and was complaining because he just couldn't get there. He was old and slow and couldn't get to the water. Was it a "divine appointment" when the Lord came and healed him. Absolutely. All the disciples - those were "divine appointments." All of the apostles were "divine appointments." The woman at the well was a "divine appointment." That's a message that echos throughout eternity for each one of us especially the woman at the well. May God's will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. He's giving us the promises, the heavenly blessings to be bestowed on each as they are in heaven.

It's difficult to hear the Lord's voice. We have many, many questions as to what we should do. I have two young men that live in my home, Caleb and Joshua, my sons. Caleb is eighteen and Joshua is sixteen. They are on the verge of having to make some tough decisions, more so Caleb now because he is a senior in high school. Within six months he's going to have to have a good idea of what he's going to do after graduation. That's just the way it works. When you are 18 you are on your own. You've got decisions to make. We can help and encourage and aid as much as parents can but at the same time it is his choice isn't it and I see even in his life it weighs on him heavily. What should he do and the options that are there, the things that he looks at and does. I was there once and it was such a painful time for me. Decisions that you make, they are very hard. The thing that I would say to the Lord at that age, all of us say it and I've said it many, many times since, Lord, why don't you tell me what I should



do? Why can't you open up the skies and just show me. Sometimes we are oblivious to the fact.

Like the man Brother Hugh and I met in town one time. We were sitting there and he was discouraged. He said, 'I wish the Lord would just open up the skies and tell me what I should do. Almost as soon as he gets those words out of his mouth, he gets a text from his sister led by the Spirit that tells him what he should do and he tosses the phone on the table with tears in his eyes and looks at us like you aren't going to believe this. There it is. Sometimes that happens. Most of the time the Lord is waiting on us to do many things. How do you find out a matter? How do you find out the Lord's will? The Doctrine and Covenants says, I want you to study it out. Search it out in your mind. Search it out in your heart. The Lord doesn't want to see you in pain but the pain makes it real for you. You endure the pain. You go through all this process. What do I have to do? Oh, I see this side. This sounds like it will turn out really badly. I hope that's not what God wants me to do. This looks like it would be really good but I'm not sure. God, what do you want me to do. You've thought it out. You've studied it out. You've read about it. You've fasted and prayed about it and then He gives you this scripture. *For, behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things* (Oh, great. Now you are not going to tell me what I have to do. He says that. Those are His words. It's not meet that I should command in all things.) *for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.* The Lord is saying I don't want to have to tell you everything you have to do. My wife comes into the house. She doesn't want to have to say, 'Get the dirty socks and the shoes put in your room and in the clothes hamper.' But she has to say that all the time. I want you to do that on your own by your own free will. *Verily I say, Men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves.* (D & C 58:6c-d)

What is it that you want to do for the Lord? What is it that you feel the Lord is calling you to do? The only thing you have to weigh out is is this a righteous endeavor or is this an unrighteous endeavor? The older I get the better I get at learning how to understand what God is trying to get me to do. I'm learning how to look inside my heart but I'm 40 now so I've been doing this for 25 years. Some of you have been doing it longer than that. Some of you have been doing it for a year or less. You guys are struggling but keep struggling because it will become easier for you the more you practice.

How do you know? It's all in your heart. I don't get to tell you what is right for you. Only you and the Lord can figure this out. Let me give you some scenarios. Grace and I wanted to move to Southern Missouri fifteen years ago. We were going to put our house on the market. We had just bought it 2 years before but we felt compelled to do this. It was a righteous desire. We stuck the sign in the yard and nobody came and looked at our house. In fact, we got phone calls offering half the amount we were asking. We were already upside down in this place. We had just bought it and had no equity. That was when we were introduced to this scripture.

A priesthood man came to our house and said, 'You shouldn't do anything unless God tells you to do it.' All of a sudden I'm convicted. That night I left the house and went to my mentor's house who was my father. I was in tears and I said, 'Look we're doing this because we feel led to do this. We feel like God wants us to do this but now we have this elder who's saying you shouldn't do anything unless God commands you to do it. Dad pulled out his scriptures to Section 58:6c-d, handed it to me and had me read it. He goes, 'What are your desires?' Our desires were to serve the Lord. Our desires were to see people brought into the kingdom. Our desires were to recapture those who had left. Those were our desires. At the end of the year we ended up staying. Other things happened and we never sold the house. That was our fleece and we felt like the Lord wanted us to stay but it was the righteous desires that the Lord was willing to honor. In honoring that I lost one job that paid less and I gained a new job that payed more and gave great benefits. The Lord offers things through these "divine appointments" and He wants us to pursue Him and to follow hard after His will.

That would be my closing today. First thing we need to pray and pray always but you need to have your head up looking for "divine appointments." That appointment may be today. It may be right here in these next few moments. This may be a "divine appointment." You may walk out of here and there may be one outside. There may be one in a gas station. There may be one in a store. There may be one in a school. There may be one on the basketball court or volleyball court or soccer field or football field. There may be one in your classroom but there is a "divine appointment." The Lord has people out there who are clamoring who need to hear a word of hope.

It's very difficult today in 2021 to keep your mouth shut. It's very difficult today to not be angry and to not create an attitude because we are being pitted against each other as Americans. We are. The verbiage that has been used over the last five or six years has divided us and it has caused us to have arguments that we really shouldn't be having. I want you to get your nose in the scriptures and consider this with all of the conversations that you've had, all of the issues that are before us politically. Where are they addressed in scripture. Most of the time they're not. Your job is to build the Kingdom of God. How do you build the Kingdom of God? Men should be anxiously engaged, so men and women should be anxiously engaged in a good cause and do many things of their own free will and bring to pass much righteousness for the power is in them wherein they are agents unto themselves.

(Continued below)



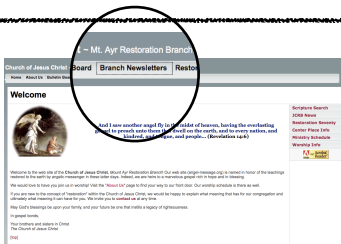
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And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for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

(Chris Pedersen continued from above)

When we talk about judging what we are doing is judging our hearts and our actions. The Lord is the judge of other men and He's the judge of you and me but what we are required to do is to have charity. Charity is the pure love of Christ. Christ was vicious. He was divisive to the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He called them hypocrites and vipers but the ones that we tend to be more cold and calloused toward are the ones that are bruised and battered and torn. They are unloveable because they seem hateful to you but they are hurt. They are not Pharisees. They are Sadducees. Those are the ones that Christ would go to the well. How many husbands did the woman at the well have? She had five and the one she was with she actually wasn't married to so Jesus said, 'You said well. You've had five husbands and the one that you are with now is not your husband.' She was living in adultery and Christ was calling out her sin but He did so with such charity and love and He had the power. Not one of us have I seen stand in the stead of Christ adequate enough to bring that kind of power into somebody's life.

So I would admonish you to charity. It says we can have all these other things, prophecies, the gifts of the Spirit but if we have not charity we are nothing. So I challenge you this day to leave and in the next two weeks seek out those "divine appointments." Dive into them and let the Lord do what He does.