

February 2024

Daily Bread

Thursday, February 1, 2024

**Peace for All**

By Delores Rains, Lee's Summit, Missouri, USA

*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone...*

—1 Timothy 2:1

In the name of the Prince of Peace we pray, wanting to express our deep gratitude for your abiding love and grace.

We pray for persons who are experiencing the turmoil of brokenness which separates them from others and from sensing your presence. May your peace bring wholeness where there is brokenness.

We pray for persons who are experiencing the agony of physical pain which prevents the expression of joyful living. May your peace bring comfort amid such pain.

We pray for your creation of plant and animal. May humankind be wise in its stewardship of your generous handiwork. May all persons strive for peaceful living with all of creation.

We pray for the Earth's children. May the youth experience a peace that passes all understanding. May the adult children of God leave a legacy of true shalom for future generations.

May the peace of God dwell in our hearts, in our words, and in our actions as we engage each other throughout our days. Amen.

**Prayer Phrase:** "...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Lamentations 3:32).

**Spiritual Practice: Breathing God's Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God's presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God's Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God's compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Friday, February 2, 2024

## **Beckoning Deep**

By Lu Mountenay, archived

*They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

—Isaiah 11:9

The tide approaches and bathes the toddler's bare feet. Foam eddies around his ankles and toes. The wild water dances and then recedes, leaving shells and frosted glass. The child grows bored with the edge of the sea, but fears to go into the deep. He runs home for assurance and then wades back in, right up to his knees.

Breakers chase the growing body, like little white pups licking at his toes—rolling over each other in bubbly sprays and leaping high in the salty mist. No longer afraid, the young man bobs on swells that hide him from the shore. He lets the surf lift and lower him into watery mountains and valleys.

Walking the sand with the love of his life while his children are combing the beach, his playground has changed from splashing and diving to ebb tide and calm tidal pools.

Now he walks with a bend in his back and the support of a cane. Wrinkles rest on his face. His eyes shine with memories of little white pups, and he has no fear of the beckoning deep.

**Prayer Phrase:** "...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God's Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God's presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God's Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God's compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Saturday, February 3, 2024

## **Peace Will Reign**

“My Savior Said That I Should Be,” *Community of Christ Sings* 589

By Harry J. Fielding of Bellara, Queensland, Australia

*And whoso shall publish peace, yea, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be.*

—1 Nephi 3:189

My Savior said that I should be a model of his love for me,  
to show God’s love to those around, for all the world is holy ground!

O God, I plead that through your grace I’ll see your love in every face,  
in every flow’r, in every tree, reflections of eternity.

The peace of Christ renews my soul; it fills my life and make me whole,  
restores the world to harmony. The peace of Christ will set me free.

The Spirit breathes and conquers fear; it brings to life God’s kingdom here  
and peace will reign, contention cease. The pow’r of Love brings perfect peace!

Let me break down the walls of hate and help your kingdom to create.  
God, send me forth and let me be an echo of divinity.

**Prayer Phrase:** “...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love” (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God’s Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God’s presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God’s Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God’s compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Sunday, February 4, 2024

## **Mission by All Means**

By Bob Kyser of Independence, Missouri, USA

*...I have become all things to all people that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.*

—1 Corinthians 9:22–23

I affirm my calling is to share the gospel with all people. Sharing the good news of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ with others has been a blessing to me. Witnessing a diversity of people respond to the gospel through baptism of water and spirit is one of my greatest joys. That joy has been experienced in Africa, Europe, South and Central America, as well as in North America.

Since my retirement my world has narrowed, and the mission is closer at hand. Primarily it focuses on my congregation and community. While still striving to share the gospel with all, I have felt drawn to be with children on their discipleship journey. Calling them by name, attending their activities, visiting them when they are sick, and teaching their pre-baptismal classes are all ways in which I can share Christ's message with them.

I was recently invited by their teacher to share with three children in their pre-baptismal class. I had been asked to especially reach out to a boy who was taking the class for the second time to see if he was ready to be baptized. I began my visit by asking them what they liked best about their class. Being together was what they liked best. In a few words they gave expression to the blessings of a special community they had formed. I then asked what they thought of being baptized. Each of them said they were ready. The boy who had not been ready a year ago said yes and pointed to me. He had made a good friend at children's camp the previous summer. That new friend invited him to take the pre-baptismal class again. A new community was born. Their excitement was contagious. This is, for me, is mission by all means.

**Prayer Phrase:** "...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God's Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God's presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God's Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God's compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Monday, February 5, 2024

## **Serve Others**

[Adapted from *Choose Generosity: Discovering Whole-Life Stewardship*, Herald House, pp. 40–41]

*If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.*

—1 Corinthians 12:26–27

As we share God’s grace and love through service to others, we learn that God’s blessings are limitless—the more we give away, the more blessings are returned. When we extend our lives in service to others, we learn that we receive even as we are giving. Giving and receiving integrate in a cycle where one prompts the other.

This cycle of giving and receiving should not be confused with what is known as the prosperity gospel or prosperity theology. The prosperity gospel is a belief that God rewards faithfulness and financial generosity through improved health and increased wealth.

We receive God’s gifts that we understand flow freely. We do not earn God’s gifts through our faithful works. As disciples, we then are called to share God’s gifts with others. Our giving blesses us and creates new relationships that offer more opportunities to share. And the cycle continues.

This ongoing cycle keeps us connected to God and one another. Through these connections, we discover that God gifts each one—and the whole community—with grace and love. So individually and collectively we receive God’s blessings, and we, in turn, bless others. When we respond together, we give shape and form to God’s vision of shalom through faithful and generous living.

**Prayer Phrase:** “...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love” (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God’s Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God’s presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God’s Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God’s compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Tuesday, February 6, 2024

## **Impossible**

[Excerpted from *Pathway to Abundant Generosity*, Herald House, p. 15]

*For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.*

—Isaiah 54:10

Love drives generosity that arises from compassionate hearts to meet the great needs of others. Generosity is an agent of change and transformation as it fulfills, lifts, and provides what many desperately need—temporally and spiritually.

Our generosity is not inspired by what others deserve, but what they need. We begin to see, with God's grace, how many lives are waiting for the redeeming power of our generosity.

Our abundant generosity to achieve Christ's mission makes possible what otherwise seems impossible. The urgency for generous disciples fully devoted to the cause of Zion has never been greater.

**Prayer Phrase:** "...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God's Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God's presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God's Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God's compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

## **Listen**

By Cheryl Saur of Saint Charles, Missouri, USA

*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.*

—Colossians 3:12

A pleasant clerk stood behind the counter as I checked out after shopping one afternoon. My purchases included four small, scented jar candles to be used as gifts. As she scanned the candles, the clerk commented on how nice they smelled, and I explained that they were for my sisters. When she asked how many sisters I have, she was surprised when I told her four. Then I explained that my husband also has one sister, but I couldn't give her a candle because her husband has emphysema and cannot be around strong scents. The clerk immediately responded that she had lost her mother to emphysema a few months earlier and strong scents had bothered her a lot. My heart was touched, and I shared that I had watched a friend die a lingering death due to emphysema some years ago and it was a terrible way to end life. Her eyes teared up as she agreed that it was.

Just a brief touchpoint since I did not learn the clerk's name, but our lives connected on a level deeper than the ordinary as we met in that moment of understanding. How often we miss those touchpoint moments because we are too busy or distracted to pick up on them and therefore a meaningful connection to the life of another goes unnoticed. Someone who once met former President Bill Clinton said one of Clinton's gifts was his remarkable ability to focus completely on who he was speaking with so that person felt they were truly heard.

Perhaps Jesus was able to do just that, and perhaps one of Jesus' lessons to the Apostles was the simple message to be fully aware of what was going on in the lives of those around them. Jesus calls us today to be aware of those around us; to listen with our hearts, not just to their words, but to their pain and their often-silent cries for understanding. If we hear with our spiritual ears, then we can discern the real meaning beneath a person's words and are able to sense and understand their need. The Mission Prayer speaks volumes about Christ's call to us:

God, where will your Spirit lead today?  
Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.  
Grant me the courage to risk something new  
and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

In this day of isolationism due in part to electronic communication, perhaps it would be well to put aside those devices at times to look into others' eyes, hear their voices, and listen with our spiritual ears to be fully engaged with them. May we have the courage to look into the eyes of those we meet and allow God's spirit in us to respond to the spirit in them. Be blessed with new and renewed joy as you bless others.

**Prayer Phrase:** "...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God's Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God's presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God's Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God's compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.



Thursday, February 8, 2024

## **Empty Handed**

[Excerpted from *Of Water and Spirit Sharing Services*, Herald House, p. 6]

*He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.*

—Psalm 147:3

We know Jesus will not wait on us to be at work in the world. When we find him, we have the choice to resist or join in. We are called to follow Jesus into a maturity of faith and life as a disciple. We are called to live our mission, even when tempted to stay safe and small. We can travel along the same paths, inattentively meandering with everyone else, assuming he is with us. Or we can wake up, attentive enough to recognize his absence in our own agenda, and begin the search for Christ alive in the world.

There is something to learn from where we find Christ. We know as he matured into ministry he was found in the temple, engaging deeply and fully in his faith. He was listening, questioning, confronting. We may find him at a sinner's table, healing the blind beggar, and calling for mercy for a woman sentenced to death. We may find him denouncing our fear amid the storm, and in the mountains for renewal and prayer. We may find him feeding the masses and breaking bread in the upper room with his beloved community. We find him on the cross, but when we look in the tomb, again he is not where we expect him to be. We find him in fullness of life.

It is not that Jesus ever really leaves us; but that when we stop seeking, we may stop seeing. Once we think we already know all there is to know, we find ourselves strangely emptyhanded, retracing our steps, looking for the One who calls us continually to grow.

**Prayer Phrase:** "...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God's Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God's presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God's Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God's compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Friday, February 9, 2024

## **Lost in the Woods**

By Susan Oxley of Seattle, Washington, USA

*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*

—Matthew 11:28

I got lost in the woods today.

An unexplored trailhead beckoned me beyond a muddy entrance into a steep decline. New spring undergrowth crowded into the trail with young blackberry vines, tall weeds, and poison ivy. I walked carefully, reveling in the green challenge and shadowy depths of unknown territory. As the trail branched and changed, I consistently chose the left fork, believing that it would eventually lead me back to civilization and home.

I suddenly faced a deep ravine, where the path had been washed out by recent rains. I turned back, chose another fork, and came once again to the ravine. And again. I would have to retrace my steps—but could I find my way? Twenty minutes later I knew I was lost in the maze of little-used trails. The woods were bordered on three sides by residential areas, with beach on the fourth side. There was no danger. But being lost is an uneasy feeling.

I pushed on, trying to make wise choices. And this time, instead of watching the trail and underbrush, I lifted my eyes to watch the canopy of leaves overhead. Eventually I found what I was looking for: less leaf coverage and more light. The canopy continued to thin, trees became less dense, and I found a trail that led me to someone's back yard. The adventure had ended.

Life is like that. We push forward over rough patches and through weeds, focusing on the tangles of life. Then we pause to pay attention. We remember that we are surrounded by God's love, held in God's arms. We lift our eyes and dimly see God's light shining through the shifting shadows overhead. When we focus on the light, open to changing directions, we can find our way home.

**Prayer Phrase:** "...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God's Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God's presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God's Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God's compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Saturday, February 10, 2024

## **A Changed Perspective**

[Excerpted from *Fully Awake and Ready to Respond*, Herald House, 2017, pp. 10–11]

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

—Romans 12:3–5

In Luke 7:36–50 Jesus visits the home of a Pharisee for dinner. A woman of the city (involved in activity consider sinful) knew Jesus would be there for dinner. She came into the house, washed his feet with her tears, and anointed his feet with ointment. The Pharisee was quick to criticize. If Jesus was a prophet, he certainly would have known this was a sinful woman undeserving of his attention.

Jesus calls the Pharisee to see this woman for who she really is—a child of God. He says to the Pharisee, “Do you see this woman?” He then goes on to share all the ways this woman extended hospitality and love to him. Having received Jesus’ compassion and love, she understood their transformative power. She was freed to see an alternative vision of her worth as Jesus courageously spoke and stood in solidarity with her.

Spiritual awakening calls us into a space of seeing, feeling, and acting differently when we encounter the Spirit in relationship with others.

“God, where will your Spirit lead today? Help me be fully awake...”

The Spirit has been striving with us through numerous sacred passages in recent years to discern, embrace, and risk living into our identity and calling as communities of Christ (Doctrine and Covenants 163:1–2). We have been invited into a new awakening through Christ that causes us to see ourselves and others from a changed perspective (Doctrine and Covenants 164:5).

**Prayer Phrase:** “...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love” (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God’s Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God’s presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God’s Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God’s compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Sunday, February 11, 2024

## **Come and Bring Light**

By David Anderson, High Priest Quorum president

*For it is the God who said, “Light will shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

—2 Corinthians 4:6

Sometimes I just don’t get it. I lose perspective. During those moments, life seems messy, complicated—and patently unfair. Sickness, cancer, abuse, pollution, corruption, greed, conspiracy theories, divisiveness, lies, war, and political rancor unsettle me. Words like ambiguity, disorientation, sadness, trouble, anxiety, longing for the past, fear, and distress—and yes, even darkness—help describe my emotional state during those times.

I cry out to God in the darkness! I lament. For me lament is praying to God in my moments of confusion, anger, sadness, and trouble. Lament is going to God in times like these. It speaks truth—an honest, sincere, authentic cry to God in personal ways. It is both confession and petition. Yet, lament must move from hurt, pain, and suffering to a transformative experience of gratitude, trust, and ultimately hope.

As I reflect on today’s scripture and theme, I rejoice in a loving and gracious God, and my heart shouts, “Come and Bring Light!” I proclaim hope! Hope is an assurance of God’s love. It is to share joyously in the gospel, to witness of God’s gift of grace and generosity with unbounded love, to struggle against violence, sickness, and inequality; to enter into solidarity with all who suffer; and to take risks for freedom, peace, and justice for all.

True Christian hope is action in which we wholeheartedly work toward the consummation of life in communion with God and all of creation so all may flourish. We live in unsettled times. Regardless of what the future might bring, the spirit of lament and Christian hope calls us to share honestly and joyously the mission of Jesus Christ in the midst of the messiness and darkness of life. Let us both lament the suffering in our world but proclaim together with steadfast hope, “Come and Bring Light!”

**Prayer Phrase:** “...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love” (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God’s Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God’s presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God’s Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God’s compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Monday, February 12, 2024

## Seeking

[Excerpted from *Of Water and Spirit Sharing Services*, Herald House, p.5]

*The Lord said to Moses, "Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."*

—Exodus 34:27

A blessing for seeking  
For courage enough to enter in  
To the deep mystery places  
Which humble us into realizing  
All we do not, cannot know

For wisdom enough to follow  
The traces of light in the darkness  
To not let fear of night stall us  
From moving through the moments  
That are forming us unseen

For strength of heart  
To walk boldly forward  
When the path ahead is uncertain  
And safety tempts us with return  
To what we already think we know

For vulnerability along the way  
That we may truly feel the path we're on  
That we may be open to what it brings  
That we may not flee from perceived dangers  
That we may be changed in the walking

A blessing for seeking  
A blessing for the way the seeking itself  
Is the One we seek.

**Prayer Phrase:** "...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God's Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God's presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God's Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God's compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Tuesday, February 13, 2024

## **Creating Space**

By Charmaine Chvala-Smith of Independence, Missouri, USA

*You are called to create pathways in the world for peace in Christ to be relationally and culturally incarnate. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness.*

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:3a

Gracious and loving God, as we gather to worship you today, we remember your desire to bless all your creation. So, we pray for the power of your peace to be freed in the world. Remembering that you came to us as a defenseless baby keeps us centered in the kind of peace you bring.

In our prayer for peace, we seek your clarity and your courage; clarity to recognize injustice against the most helpless in our society and courage to act on their behalf. Help us to challenge the systems within our influence that value the wealth of some over the health and safety of the most vulnerable.

God, you showed us your love. In Christ's life, ministry, and death, we begin to take in the depths of your compassion, and we know that you comprehend the pain and hope each one here feels.

We pray for those nearby and far away whose home is the street and whose constant companions are need and fear. We pray for those whose innocence has been compromised by greed or neglect. We pray for those whose conscience has been crippled by racism, hate, or affluence; for those whose eyes have been blinded and hearts hardened by excess, by harm, or by ego.

We ask your Spirit's nearness when we fail or stumble in our attempts to uphold each one as a child of yours. We need your presence so we will not be discouraged in our efforts or lose sight of the ways in which your love connects us to each other.

We believe your kingdom is a place where each person can know their worth, to you and to the world. Guide us individually and as a body as we endeavor to create a space for your kingdom in our midst.

We offer this prayer to you, that Christ's way might more fully become our way. Amen.

**Prayer Phrase:** "...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Breathing God's Compassion**

Light a candle and sit quietly, reflecting on the fire and light of God. Pay attention to your breathing and let it become calmer and deeper as you focus on God's presence. Ask God to breathe in you. Image each breath carrying the light of God into your lungs, bloodstream, and every cell in your body until God's Spirit fills you. Now imagine breathing out God's compassion and grace each time you exhale. Pray to have the Spirit of Christ radiate from your life like the gentle flame of a candle.

Wednesday, February 14, 2024

**Live for Others**

“Let Us Pray for One Another,” *Community of Christ Sings* 186

By Maurice L. Draper

*But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

—Matthew 6:5–6

Let us pray for one another that our minds and hearts may blend  
as we grow in love and mercy, day by day, till life shall end.

We can see how others need us; may we also dare to say  
that in love we'll share together; for each other let us pray.

We are walking down time's vista; Zion's banner now unfurled  
calls to stewardship of caring and redemption of the world.

Let us pray that we may ever sense God's guidance in the way;  
as we try to live for others, for each other let us pray.

O'er the world the day is dawning through the Spirit's light and power  
when the people of all nations sense the challenge of this hour.

That our lives may now be given to each other in God's way,  
in the name of Christ the Savior, for each other let us pray.

**Prayer Phrase:** “Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

**Spiritual Practice: An Offering of Ashes**

God promises to heal our wounds and losses. Hold (or imagine holding) a pinch of ashes in your hands as you become aware of circumstances in your life, family, congregation, and the world that are broken, lost, or falling apart. Be honest with God about the fear, sadness, or burden you feel. Offer the ashes to God in prayer. Ask God to create beauty, peace, and healing in the places and people who now experience the ashes of despair and grief.

Thursday, February 15, 2024

## **Grounded in Love**

[Excerpted from *Let Peace Dwell Here*, 2022 Adult Study Resource, p. 8]

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?*

—Isaiah 58:6

Jesus focused on bringing about God’s kingdom through love. It would be unfaithful to the witness of the New Testament to reduce the love modeled by Jesus to being only about nonviolence. Jesus sought for a bigger peace than simply the absence of violence. His teaching and actions were about how we treat one another if we replace the rules of human cultures with interactions grounded in love, as God loves. He taught how acting in this kind of love would bring shalom—a Hebrew word that captures the ideal of complete well-being in every facet of life, of being in balance with the best of what God wants for each one.

A culture’s rules often indicate that it’s acceptable to care only about people who are like us. In contrast, Jesus offered the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). Its lesson is that when confronted with the suffering inflicted on those who are other, loving as God loves calls us to go beyond the indifference encouraged by our culture. Jesus tells us to be like the Samaritan who chose instead to respond to suffering with compassion and action.

Jesus’ embodiment of God’s love for all did not mean that he avoided confrontations. He actively pushed back against the political, religious, and economic injustices of that day. He did not hesitate to criticize people in power for willfully not living up to the best of what they knew was taught in their scriptures, traditions, and by God. Through his words and actions, Jesus affirmed God’s love and presence was for everyone, even those who opposed him.

**Prayer Phrase:** “...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love” (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Tears of Compassion**

Offer a silent prayer for the gift of God’s compassion. Cup your hands and ask God to make you aware of the suffering that causes the Earth and its inhabitants to groan and weep. Be open to faces or places, sounds, or voices; feelings of connection with those who suffer. Imagine catching the tears of those you see and holding them in your hands. Listen for prayer images or words God may give you. Discern any active responses of ministry or healing you sense invited to complete for those who weep.



Friday, February 16, 2024

## **Choose Hope**

[Excerpted from President Steve Veazey's closing remarks at the 2023 World Conference]

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

—Romans 15:13

Sometimes we make it too complicated! The inner journey of knowing ourselves and God and the outward journey of enacting God's love and justice can be embodied by individuals or groups anywhere as naturally as breathing in and out.

Of course, spiritual journeys—whether individual or communal—are not so much about final arrivals as they are ongoing movements.

Asking questions is faithfulness because we genuinely are seeking God's guidance all the time. However, discernment of any type is not a time to pause or take a "wait-and-see" attitude before engaging in ministry. Often, insights come as we respond and reflect on our ministry experience.

Continuing Revelation provides guidance for the church and offers assurance that we are headed in the right direction, or it spiritually nudges us to get us back on track. Doctrine and Covenants 164:9a affirms that "we are poised to fulfill God's ultimate vision for the church."

Poised means that the capacity to answer God's call is present within all of us, yearning to be fully released. From this and other passages, we see that Community of Christ has a hopeful future of continuing adventure with God, if we choose it! But make no mistake, choosing the future God envisions will require discernment, courage, sacrifice, generosity, flexibility, and creativity!

Our courageous journey is one of continuous formation in Christ expressed through sacred community that is Christ's light, leaven, and salt in the world (Matthew 5:13–16, Luke 13:20–21 NRSV).

Many types and degrees of community in the world serve their purposes. We are called to courageously walk with Jesus Christ and, in the process, become sacred community through which Christ is revealed. That is what it means to be Community OF Christ!

**Prayer Phrase:** "...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Tears of Compassion**

Offer a silent prayer for the gift of God's compassion. Cup your hands and ask God to make you aware of the suffering that causes the Earth and its inhabitants to groan and weep. Be open to faces or places, sounds, or voices; feelings of connection with those who suffer. Imagine catching the tears of those you see and holding them in your hands. Listen for prayer images or words God may give you. Discern any active responses of ministry or healing you sense invited to complete for those who weep.

Saturday, February 17, 2024

## **Renewal**

By Matthew Frizzell, Director of Human Resource Ministries

*Therefore, they gave thanks unto the Lord, their God; yea, and they did fast much and pray much; and they did worship God with exceeding great joy.*

—Alma 21:2

Lent is a time of emptying. Nearly six weeks long, the emptiness of Lent holds a mystery. Lent lays bare the open secrets of this mystery.

The emptiness of Lent is not to punish us for our sins. It is not to expose our worthlessness or celebrate human depravity. On the contrary, God made all things good (Genesis 1:31). Lent is a reminder of our source of life and essential spirituality. Something about our humanity is both creaturely and divine. Humans are both free and dependent. The mystery of God's image is woven into our humanness.

Lent draws us into this mystery with practices and meditations that aim at emptiness. Some fast from food or television. Others fast from complaining, social media, or the news. Each person is invited to pray and reflect in empty stillness. The aim is to empty and open ourselves to God's presence for renewal.

Like being dragged into a paradox, Lent's emptiness can fill us and make us whole. Fasting, our bodies feel the discomfort of emptiness. Removing distractions, we face the emptiness of our minds and mental lives. As emptiness settles in and matures, it reaches our emotions. The experience of emptiness is physical, mental, and emotional. It differs from our ordinary aims and aspirations for fulfillment. Lent's emptiness puts our regular lives, agendas, longings, and wants in spiritual perspective.

The paradox of feeling Lent's emptiness in its fullness unfolds our mystery. We are more than hunger. We are more than daily anxiety. We are more than our aspirations and wants. Neither food nor television, news nor complaining, social media nor daily activity, sustains us or makes us whole. Stripped down, laid bare, simplified, and emptied out, we can finally receive God's gift to us. We are dependent on God and woven with God's image. Emptiness is the path that takes us there.

**Prayer Phrase:** "...he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Lamentations 3:32).

### **Spiritual Practice: Tears of Compassion**

Offer a silent prayer for the gift of God's compassion. Cup your hands and ask God to make you aware of the suffering that causes the Earth and its inhabitants to groan and weep. Be open to faces or places, sounds, or voices; feelings of connection with those who suffer. Imagine catching the tears of those you see and holding them in your hands. Listen for prayer images or words God may give you. Discern any active responses of ministry or healing you sense invited to complete for those who weep.

Sunday, February 18, 2024

## **When We Are Tested**

By Kris Judd of Des Moines, Iowa, USA

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."*

—Mark 1:9–11

Standing before a congregation to share a message has grown to be much more comfortable over the years. Shy in front of groups, I made my way through prepared notes and apologies for what I had to offer. Over time and practice, my comfort level in public ministry grew. So, when I received the invitation to speak at a large youth gathering, I did not hesitate to say yes.

As I stood backstage, preparing to go out into the bright lights and to the large crowd, I listened to the person speaking before me. I had prepared my message based on the theme and what I felt led to share. But the tone and feeling the person on stage was encouraging didn't match my message, which I was sure was going to be a disappointment. I thought, what am I doing here? How are they going to react? Who wants to hear what I have to say? Self-doubt overwhelmed me in that wilderness moment. Maybe I could just go off script and keep the applause and energy going, even if it felt artificial to me. That way they will like me.

I had a decision to face. Whose voice of affirmation and approval did I want to hear? A crowd of energized youth who could share on social media a great night with me on stage even if I felt like an unprepared imposter? Or that of the One whose thoughts and love I had felt led to share in my authentic voice, even if the message was to fall flat? Whose love did I need in that moment?

I have no real memories of what I said that night, or even how the crowd responded. What I do remember were those moments of temptation to be popular, to fit in, and to make an impression. And I remember the sacred reminder of my own belovedness. It did not matter what the crowd thought, regardless of who they were. God was inviting me to be myself and to share what needed to be said. For a moment, I considered selling myself out in order to be "loved," when in reality it was only in owning who I truly was at my core, beloved, that I experienced the real Love.

**Prayer Phrase:** "For he will be like a tree planted by water..." (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Deepening Roots**

A tree with superficial roots will wither during drought or severe storms may uproot it. A tree whose roots go deep is stable and draws from deep waters. Imagine yourself as a tree by a river or stream. Sense your roots extending deep into the earth in search of God's Spirit. Reflect or pray about what you hope to find as your spirit searches for deeper identity in God.

Monday, February 19, 2024

## **Courage to Live**

By Scott Murphy, First Presidency

[Excerpted from “What Will We Bring...?”, March/April 2023 *Herald*, p. 5]

*Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart; with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning...*  
—Joel 2:12

The invitation to journey through Lent, which always brings us to the cross and then the gift of Easter, is a time of honest self-reflection of our life and relationship with Christ. As Walter Brueggemann suggests, “Lent is a time for thinking again about our true identity and our true desire.” At its basic level, it is a time to explore who we are and who we are called to be.

To walk this path is an act of faith and an act of courage. For without courage, we never fully enter the space where we honestly can see ourselves and then see ourselves in how God sees us.

It is this essence of faith and courage demonstrated in Jesus as he made his way into the wilderness and explored his true identity and desire. It was courage from that inner place of love for God that took him home to proclaim the mission he was committed to live for the salvation of others (Luke 4:18–19). And it was courage that made it possible for him to face the consequence of the cross to make the presence of God’s peaceable reign on Earth tangible for all to encounter.

Faith in God produces courage to live a new way.

The season of Lent is the gift of space and time to explore and see our life through the love and acts of Jesus. But while Lent invites us into self-reflection, and maybe even repentance, we ultimately discover that the journey is moving us into the future that Easter shows us.

**Prayer Phrase:** “For he will be like a tree planted by water...” (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Spiritual Practice: Deepening Roots**

A tree with superficial roots will wither during drought, or severe storms may uproot it. A tree whose roots go deep is stable and draws from deep waters. Imagine yourself as a tree by a river or stream. Sense your roots extending deep into the Earth in search of God’s Spirit. Reflect or pray about what you hope to find as your spirit searches for deeper identity in God.

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

## **Desert Times**

By Jane Gardner, presiding evangelist

*I will meditate on all your work and muse on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy.*

—Psalm 77:12–13a

Often during the season of Lent, the psalmist cries, “God, where are you?” It is a lament from one who cannot sense the divine presence. Did you know there are more laments in the book of Psalms than psalms of praise? For me, that makes the Bible relevant—it speaks to our living—because in times of trial and challenge, I am also asking, “God, why aren’t you here?”

Intellectually I know God is always present. I believe it. But, when faced with unbearable loss or depression or pain, it is so tempting to blame God’s absence for the difficulty. “If God would just show up, my troubles would melt away” does not represent a very mature understanding of God’s presence and generosity on my part.

Biblical laments generally include addressing God, expressing a complaint, making a request, and ending with affirmation. For example, Psalm 22 addresses God: “My God, my God,” followed by the complaints: “Why have you forsaken me?” and “Why are you so far from helping me?” [v.1]. In verse 19, the request is stated: “...do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!” Then, the psalmist moves to words of trust: “...he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him” [24] and “To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him” [29].

In my better moments I get it—the journey through complaining, requesting, and then affirming, is the blessing. But it’s helpful to know that I’m in good company with others who have felt deserted—especially during Lent. Do we have to wander in the desert with the children of Israel? Must we step into the desert with Jesus where temptation waits? The answer is a resounding “Yes!” This forty days of introspection, searching, and, sometimes, desolation, has the potential to be the most informative and stretching season within our discipleship and ministry.

This modern poem begins with lament and is written on my heart:

Though my soul may set in darkness, it will rise in perfect light;  
I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night.

—Sarah Williams, *Twilight Hours: A Legacy of Verse*

These words and the pattern they represent have been my constant companion for years. During the Lenten season, they call me to an authentic struggle through the desert, with the assurance that my life’s journey, even the darkness, is accompanied by Divine Love. With every step in the desert I will repeat, “I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night.”

**Prayer Phrase:** “For he will be like a tree planted by water...” (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Spiritual Practice: Deepening Roots**

A tree with superficial roots will wither during drought, or severe storms may uproot it. A tree whose roots go deep is stable and draws from deep waters. Imagine yourself as a tree by a river or stream. Sense your roots extending deep into the Earth in search of God’s Spirit. Reflect or pray about what you hope to find as your spirit searches for deeper identity in God.

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

## **Fullness of the Gospel**

[Excerpted from *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*, 4th Edition, pp. 13–14]

*God is calling for a prophetic community to emerge, drawn from the nations of the world, that is characterized by uncommon devotion to the compassion and peace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.*

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:11a

God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and continued presence through the Holy Spirit, as proclaimed by scripture, is the foundation of our faith, identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

Early in its history, the church, often referred to as the Restoration movement, perceived the call to share the fullness of the gospel throughout the world (Doctrine and Covenants 1:4). Today, we understand this as the call to share the peace of Jesus Christ in all its personal, interpersonal, community, and worldwide dimensions.

Sharing the peace of Jesus Christ involves generously and compassionately offering witness, ministry, sacraments, and community life that reconciles and restores people to right or righteous relationships with God, themselves, others, and creation. This holistic approach to proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel is faithful to our best understanding of God’s will.

**Prayer Phrase:** “For he will be like a tree planted by water...” (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Spiritual Practice: Deepening Roots**

A tree with superficial roots will wither during drought, or severe storms may uproot it. A tree whose roots go deep is stable and draws from deep waters. Imagine yourself as a tree by a river or stream. Sense your roots extending deep into the Earth in search of God’s Spirit. Reflect or pray about what you hope to find as your spirit searches for deeper identity in God.

Thursday, February 22, 2024

## **The Same Moon**

By Ruth Potter of Blue Springs, Missouri, USA

*As for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause.*

—Job 5:8

The Gulf breezes were warm, and the waves were breaking almost as far out as the horizon. This was unusual because almost always there is a bank of clouds hiding the place where water meets sky. We sat in the condominium we had rented looking out as the moon began to peek above that space and begin its ascent. A huge orange ball began to emerge and spread its golden light in a wide path across the waters, each breaker spreading gold as it came to shore. We marveled at such a happening, and the impression of it has remained with us.

A few minutes after the moon had risen above our building, my daughter called from Missouri. We had talked for a few minutes when she exclaimed, “Mom, did you see that marvelous moon tonight?” She and I had seen the same moon though we were a thousand miles apart. We had marveled at the beauty of it at the same time.

It brought home to me the fact that the world has much to show us. All God’s creations—the moon, the blue sky, the sun that warms us—are not mine alone to enjoy but touch every person on this planet. This place we call ours is home to billions who see the same moon, sun, and blue sky but cannot see each other’s faces. What a pity we can’t see the joy that would come if we could take away the fear and hate by looking for the face of God in each one.

**Prayer Phrase:** “For he will be like a tree planted by water...” (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Spiritual Practice: Deepening Roots**

A tree with superficial roots will wither during drought, or severe storms may uproot it. A tree whose roots go deep is stable and draws from deep waters. Imagine yourself as a tree by a river or stream. Sense your roots extending deep into the Earth in search of God’s Spirit. Reflect or pray about what you hope to find as your spirit searches for deeper identity in God.

Friday, February 23, 2024

## Space

By Lisa Ash Drackert of Kansas City, Missouri, USA

*“I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.*

—Matthew 9:13

I like the idea that spaciousness can be appreciated in three ways: Time, Form, and Soul.

Space in Time is a gap between activities, agendas, and to-do list items. It’s a vacation from the incessant need to be efficient and put together and to follow all the rules. Time space is priceless because it doesn’t happen all that often in my life. I often yearn for space to rest but instead fill my hours with appointments and classes and clients and laundry and emails. Time space for me is permission to sit still and withdraw from my addiction to efficiency.

Space in Form is that unbelievable feeling of sprinting into a spacious field, flinging my arms wide open, and breathing big into the uncluttered world that holds me. It’s why I yearn to be in the mountains every summer and why I will endure 10 hours of hiking to get to the top of a 14er (4,267 meters) in Colorado. It’s why I must, for my own sanity, get out of town and into trees and on the trails weekly. Space in Form is necessary for my survival.

Space in Soul is, literally, my mental salvation. It is freedom from. It’s learning to listen to my inner voice that says: Um, maybe don’t be so stressed about this, Lis; it’s probably not a big deal. At all. (It is, usually, never a big deal.) Soul Space for me is freedom from having to react with defensiveness or insecurity when someone criticizes me. Soul Space is freedom from judging and disapproval when I look in mirrors and instead just being glad that I even remembered to take a shower and put on my shirt right-side-out. Soul Space is learning to celebrate others instead of feeling jealous or inadequate. It is freedom from having to react from fear because that’s what I’ve been conditioned to do and instead be free to respond from a place of worthiness and love. Oh, that is a sweet, sweet space.

How do these qualities of space show up in your life? How can you make more spaciousness, more sweet space, in your day today?

**Prayer Phrase:** “For he will be like a tree planted by water...” (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Spiritual Practice: Deepening Roots**

A tree with superficial roots will wither during drought, or severe storms may uproot it. A tree whose roots go deep is stable and draws from deep waters. Imagine yourself as a tree by a river or stream. Sense your roots extending deep into the Earth in search of God’s Spirit. Reflect or pray about what you hope to find as your spirit searches for deeper identity in God.



Saturday, February 24, 2024

## **The Deepest Down Thing**

[Excerpted from *Of Water and Spirit Sharing Services*, Herald House, p. 3]

*He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."*

—Mark 8:27–29

To believe is a whole-heart thing.  
It is a "this is worth my life" thing.  
It is a rooted substance in the soul,  
with permeable boundaries,  
hospitable to questions,  
and the deepening they bring.

To believe is to find a surprising strength,  
commitment to what matters most,  
even when it collides  
with what you most fear.  
It is the urge of integrity  
when injustice looms.

To believe is to set my heart on,  
to direct my life toward;  
it is the anchor I cast  
when seas of uncertainty  
swell wild in the soul.

To believe is to un-know.  
It is to not make an idol

as substitution for what is real.  
It is more than a string of words,  
more than any ritual  
that claims to contain it.

It is the deepest-down thing  
that maybe you don't yet  
know how to say.

It is to grow in attention  
to the holy refusing stagnation,  
to the unexplainable love-presence,  
embracing unseen.  
It is to follow wherever  
the Living God leads.

To believe is a whole-heart thing.  
It is a "this-is-worth-my-life" thing.  
It is the most compelling thing  
that invites me to live  
beyond my fear.

**Prayer Phrase:** "For he will be like a tree planted by water..." (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Spiritual Practice: Deepening Roots**

A tree with superficial roots will wither during drought, or severe storms may uproot it. A tree whose roots go deep is stable and draws from deep waters. Imagine yourself as a tree by a river or stream. Sense your roots extending deep into the Earth in search of God's Spirit. Reflect or pray about what you hope to find as your spirit searches for deeper identity in God.

Sunday, February 25, 2024

## **Nada te turbe**

By Larry McGuire, president of seventy

*No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore, his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.*

—Romans 4:20–25

I consider it a blessing that when I was a child, I was able to have a relationship with my great grandparents and grandparents on both sides of my family. I knew them, they knew me, and for the first 10 or 12 years of my life, they joined me in worship a few times each year.

I remember some of the stories they would share in testimony experiences in church or when we would be sitting in their living room listening to stories of their youth and life of faith.

As I have been able to share in many places where the church has a presence in cultures around the world, I often pause and reflect on how a kid who grew up in a very small farming community in northeast Michigan would end up in some of the places I’ve been blessed to experience: England, Europe, Zambia, Nepal, India, Canada, United States. Each time I pause, I am flooded with memories of people who shared their faith with me in my years growing up in the congregation of my youth. But somewhere in my faith journey, I realized their testimony could not be mine; I had to live my own testimony.

In Romans 4, Paul reminds the people of his day, and us today, that even though Abraham was old and considered too frail, he believed in what God had promised. He leaned into the promise that God gave him and experienced the deepening of his faith. Those who come after him will understand the promise, but they, too, must lean into their own encounter with God to strengthen their faith. God spoke the promise that guided Abraham and guides us, too.

The testimonies I heard from family and friends of my youth are not mine; I had to lean into my own experiences and wrestle with what I was experiencing so I had my own testimony to share. As I have experienced the faith of others around the world, their faith continues to shape my faith. Together we have a faith that guides us even when we don’t always understand. The promises of God continue to guide, generation after generation: lean on!

**Prayer Phrase:** “For he will be like a tree planted by water...” (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Spiritual Practice: Deepening Roots**

A tree with superficial roots will wither during drought, or severe storms may uproot it. A tree whose roots go deep is stable and draws from deep waters. Imagine yourself as a tree by a river or stream. Sense your roots extending deep into the Earth in search of God’s Spirit. Reflect or pray about what you hope to find as your spirit searches for deeper identity in God.

Monday, February 26, 2024

## **Saved by Grace**

By Anthony Chvala-Smith, Independence, Missouri

[Excerpted from *A Way of Life: Understanding Our Christian Faith*, pp. 88–89]

*And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

—Jeremiah 30:22

When we say that we have been “saved by grace,” what do we mean? We mean first that our status as children of God is grounded in God’s mercy. We do not find acceptance by doing all the right things. Nor do we choose discipleship because we are so smart or so good.

What brings us to God starts with God. Second, we mean that the healing of our humanity is not a do-it-yourself project. The changes needed are far too radical for that. Only the crucified and risen Love of the Living God can mend us, and so we believe that we can be saved only by grace.

Third, we mean that apart from all we can do or achieve, we ever remain fallible, broken creatures serving in an imperfect vessel called the church. Our journeys bring daily proof of how fragile our lives are and how deep the roots of brokenness lie buried in our hearts. In Christ, we who are always sinners are at the same time always his people. We mean, finally, that we are not better, nobler, or more beloved of God than others. That we have heard God’s call to serve the cause of the kingdom is a humbling mystery.

Nothing about us merits our being on this path, receiving these gifts, offering this service. We can adequately express our awe and wonder only by confessing that we are saved by grace.

**Prayer Phrase:** “For he will be like a tree planted by water...” (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Spiritual Practice: Deepening Roots**

A tree with superficial roots will wither during drought, or severe storms may uproot it. A tree whose roots go deep is stable and draws from deep waters. Imagine yourself as a tree by a river or stream. Sense your roots extending deep into the Earth in search of God’s Spirit. Reflect or pray about what you hope to find as your spirit searches for deeper identity in God.

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

## **Sacred Community**

[Excerpted from *Let Peace Dwell Here*, 2022 Adult Study Resource, pp. 38–39]

*Let the church be admonished that the times are portentous and demand faithful adherence to the faith and work of the church, that mankind may be blessed by and find peace in those religiously social reforms and relationships which have been divinely imposed as a great task of achievement.*

—Doctrine and Covenants 137:6a

Our vision of Christ-inspired, peaceful community is not new. The earliest communities of disciples, formed following Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, were admonished:

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were indeed called in one body.

—Colossians 3:14–15

This vision of Christ-inspired and Christ-shaped spiritual community has motivated disciples in every age. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian who strenuously resisted the cruelty of Nazi Germany and that resistance eventually cost him his life. Bonhoeffer wrote, “The church is not a religious community of worshippers of Christ but is Christ himself who has taken form among people.” On another occasion he stressed that the church is “Christ existing within community.” This sacred community far exceeds what we normally associate with “community.” It is more than a social or special interest group. According to 1 John 4:7–21, sacred community is rooted deeply in God's love, defined in character and action by Jesus Christ, the peaceful One, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. When people experience sacred community, they feel the love of God, encounter the peace of Jesus Christ, and receive the welcoming invitation of the Holy Spirit as never before. Involvement in sacred community changes, heals, and redeems lives.

Community of Christ is evidence of God's continuing work through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to bring sacred community into existence. From the start of this faith movement, living the principle of the gospel in local and global community has been at the center of our purpose. The cause of Zion is how we strive to live that vision. It is at the heart of who we are even as we grow in our understanding and expression of it.

Growing in sacred community compels us to expand our circles of love, concern, understanding, and action. It motivates us to interact in new ways. This growth is sometimes difficult, but the vision of Zion urges us forward.

**Prayer Phrase:** “For he will be like a tree planted by water...” (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Spiritual Practice: Deepening Roots**

A tree with superficial roots will wither during drought, or severe storms may uproot it. A tree whose roots go deep is stable and draws from deep waters. Imagine yourself as a tree by a river or stream. Sense your roots extending deep into the Earth in search of God's Spirit. Reflect or pray about what you hope to find as your spirit searches for deeper identity in God.

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

## **Through a Christ Lens**

By Katie Harmon-McLaughlin, Spiritual Formation Director

[Excerpted from “Living Jesus: Moving toward the Peaceful One,” March/April 2020 *Herald*, p. 20]

*Let contentions and quarreling among you cease. Sustain each other in peace, and ye shall be blessed with my Spirit, in comforting and strengthening you for my work.*

—Doctrine and Covenants 117:13

The content of our lives, thoughts, and imagination are places where the Spirit greets and invites us into the deeper journey of spiritual transformation. We begin to see that what happens within us impacts what we choose to do in the world around us. Discipleship is a daily choice to see all of life, even the simplest interactions and inner movements, through a Christ lens. This choice is not just for our benefit, but for the welfare of every person and creature connected to our lives on this beautiful, thriving, and aching planet.

Waking up to the sacred quality and “intimate texture” of our lives and relationships is of greatest necessity. It takes tremendous courage and integrity to live the essence of the gospel, and people are craving that kind of substance and sustenance.

Rosemarie Freney Harding, one of the mothers of the American civil-rights movement, described the spiritual quality cultivated in this undertaking of freedom, love, and justice grounded in faith. Recalling horrible atrocities and setbacks that might have been enough for any of us to cower, she wrote about the power of being with others whose lives were rooted in Christ as the source of their action:

Being constantly in the presence of people who live so fervently in the power of nonviolence, who believed and acted from the understanding that love and forgiveness were essential tools for social justice; being surrounded by people like that fed those commitments in me, in many of us. And it infused the nation.

—*Remnants: A Memoir of Spirit, Activism, and Mothering*

This kind of spiritual posture which led to tangible social change started with the discipline of listening intentionally to that inner conversation always happening within. Will I choose love or hate? Will I choose reaction or discernment? Will I choose courage or fear? Will I live in the integrity of my faith or choose what feels safer and easier?

**Prayer Phrase:** “For he will be like a tree planted by water...” (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Spiritual Practice: Deepening Roots**

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Thursday, February 29, 2024

## **Hope Leans Forward**

By Danny A. Belrose of Independence, Missouri, USA

[From “Whose Prayer,” January/February 2020 *Herald*, p. 15]

*For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.*

—Psalm 117

Whose prayer is this, God? Mine? Ours? Yours?

Look, can we set aside religious rhetoric? Drop our thee’s, thou’s, thine, praise, pleas, and petitions?

Can we pause for a fleeting moment of silence, stripped of our alphabet of grace, our holy unctions, thinly disguised as favors sought and victories won?

What did the psalmist sing? “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.”

Does the omnipotence we’ve wrapped you in render our hopes, thoughts, feelings, and stumbling words redundant before we speak them?

Does it matter? Are you “there,” or are you “here,” God? Are we praying to you, or are we praying to ourselves? Both, because you are in us, and we are in you!

We weave our wanting words and speak them because to not speak them is to not live them!

The blessing we pursue is simply this. We want to do what is right—not perfumed by hymns, homilies, and scriptural text, but fueled by integrity wed to compassionate service!

We want to be a blessing—one of healing, one of faith, of community wed to peace, of spiritual companionship, ministries of sanctuary, trust, forgiveness, justice, acceptance, and determination.

One of choice and wise choosing! One of hope.

Hope leans forward, never sleepy or lazy, never fully defeated.

Disappointed? Sometimes. Impatient? To be sure, but never throwing in the towel.

Bless us. This room of grace-filled, fumbling, bumbling, far-more-effective servants than we comprehend or accept. May we lean forward, God, celebrating what was, is, and will be: our wounds healed by your grace; our victories fueled by your love—our hope leaning far enough, long enough, patient enough to breathe in your peace.

**Prayer Phrase:** “For he will be like a tree planted by water...” (Jeremiah 17:8).

### **Spiritual Practice: Deepening Roots**

A tree with superficial roots will wither during drought, or severe storms may uproot it. A tree whose roots go deep is stable and draws from deep waters. Imagine yourself as a tree by a river or stream. Sense your roots extending deep into the Earth in search of God’s Spirit. Reflect or pray about what you hope to find as your spirit searches for deeper identity in God.