

## *Peace on Earth—Some Restrictions Apply*

JULIE FRANKLIN

**D**uring an exceptionally hectic morning my mind was full to overflowing as I thought about the stress of my day at work, family responsibilities, and additional large assignments I had at the time. I was trying to work out the physical and emotional commitment to each and was overwhelmed, knowing that one person with two hands and 24 hours in a day couldn't possibly do it all. I turned on the car radio only to hear the kind of news that makes you want to cry. As all these things swirled through my brain, the thought came to mind: "So much for peace on earth, good will to men." I wondered how the heavenly host at the birth of Christ could have possibly pronounced peace on earth and good will to men when normal people like me can be distracted by chaos, feel a lack of peace, and find a lack of evidence of good will.

Because of that little experience and the musing I did, I decided to prepare this talk about peace and good will. I began my preparation with the scriptures and read the account of the angels' appearance to the shepherds. I imagined how the shepherds must have felt, how startled they must have been, what the angel might have looked like, and how the heavenly host appeared. As I imagined the heavenly host, I saw a group of beautiful

angels illuminated by heavenly light and expressing exquisite joy through song. My children are young, and in our home the expressions of happiness and joy are full-body experiences, so the angels in my thoughts were not standing still; in my imagination they were dancing for joy. Then I got to the verse in Luke from which I believe Henry Wadsworth Longfellow took his familiar phrase "peace on earth, good will to men." The heavenly host sang out, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."<sup>1</sup>

I used the tools available to me on the Web and several commentaries in the Harold B. Lee Library to learn as much as I could about this scripture. I found that all of the conference addresses that quote this particular verse speak primarily of peace. Peace is mentioned in the scriptures multiple times and good will only a small handful of times. The two ideas of peace and good will are found together only once, in Luke 2:14. Through all of my reading and studying I decided that from a purely cerebral standpoint I think I understand the "glory to

---

*Julie Franklin was director of Residence Life at BYU when this devotional talk was given on 5 December 2006.*

God in the highest” part and the “on earth peace” part, but when it came to “good will toward men” I was stumped. My dictionary defines *good will* as “a desire for the well-being of others; benevolence,”<sup>2</sup> but I couldn’t quite figure out how it fit into the verse. It had never occurred to me that I didn’t really understand the scripture I had read literally hundreds of times.

I questioned if the angels commanded the people on earth to have “good will toward men” at the same time they pronounced peace on earth—that is, to have peace and be men of good will. I wondered if perhaps the good will mentioned was a reference to the good will of our Father expressed to us by the coming of His Only Begotten Son, the source of peace to the earth. Then I considered if perhaps the mention of good will could possibly be a condition that has to exist in order for peace to be experienced on earth.

I read several passages from books—and there are a couple of different opinions by very convincing authors, some of them learned LDS scholars and other qualified sources. I do not claim to be an expert on this subject, nor to be worthy to declare the one true way to interpret the scripture. I will leave that to each of you to discover through your own investigation. In the end, all of the different possibilities may be true, and I don’t believe one interpretation contradicts the others sufficiently to cause anyone to have heartburn—unless that person happens to be writing a devotional address. For the purpose of today’s discussion I have chosen to assume “good will toward men” refers to a condition that must exist in the hearts of men in order for peace to be felt on earth. In other words, the scripture could be read, “Glory in the highest to God and on earth peace among men of good will.”<sup>3</sup> Another way to state this, consistent with messages we receive in the media today, is “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace—some restrictions apply.” Some may assume this is proof that in heaven

there is a legal office—I personally won’t go that far.

One reason I believe that peace comes to earth with restrictions in place is based on the fact that I have experienced that phenomenon in my own life. The times I have felt the greatest peace were times when I was striving to be an instrument in the Lord’s hands and was purposefully reaching out to others. We read “there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked”<sup>4</sup> in the scriptures and sing “there is peace in righteous doing”<sup>5</sup> from the hymnbook.

The restrictions that apply to the ability to have peace on earth are somewhat specific and have nothing to do with the circumstances we find ourselves in: We can be unprepared for final exams, papers, or projects; have minimal financial resources; still have no idea what we should get for the hard-to-shop-for person in our life; have an undeclared major; be a graduate without a job offer or graduate school acceptance; have health concerns, relationship issues, acne, or a bad haircut; or live in areas where there are wars, rumors of wars, religious intolerance, oppressive leaders, or obnoxious radio talk show hosts and still have the peace the angels promised.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow probably understood this when he penned the poem “Christmas Bells” that would be set to music and become a favorite Christmas carol—the refrain of which I mentioned earlier.

Mr. Longfellow used church bells ringing on Christmas Day as the setting for a poem he wrote during the Civil War. The fighting had been fierce and touched the lives of the Longfellow family personally. Mr. Longfellow’s son Charles, who had enlisted in the Union Army at 17 years of age, had arrived home about two weeks prior to Christmas 1863 after being critically injured in a battle.<sup>6</sup> While Charles eventually recovered from his wounds, his father was likely concerned about the long-term health of his son and of his country. In

addition to these concerns, Mr. Longfellow continued to feel the grave loss of his beloved wife, Francis Appleton Longfellow, also known as Fanny. In 1861, the same year the Civil War broke out, Fanny died from injuries she sustained when her light summer dress ignited in their home. The light weight of the fabric and the hoops she wore allowed ample oxygen to feed the flames, and Mrs. Longfellow was quickly engulfed. Mr. Longfellow attempted to extinguish the fire and was himself burned in the process. With her death he was left to raise five children and manage the affairs of his home as a single parent.<sup>7</sup> The death of his wife and his son's critical injuries were not the only tragedies in Mr. Longfellow's life. Fanny was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's second wife, and together they had a daughter also named Frances who died when she was 17 months old.<sup>8</sup> His first wife, Mary Potter Longfellow, died just over a month after she miscarried during her sixth month of pregnancy.<sup>9</sup> This was a man who had every reason to pity himself and feel cranky about his condition, and yet he declared in beautiful verse:

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
"God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;  
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good will to men."*

*Till, ringing, singing, on its way,  
The world revolved from night to day,  
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,  
Of peace on earth, good will to men!<sup>10</sup>*

Jesus Christ, that highly anticipated infant whose birth has been celebrated with the ringing of Christmas bells, is a perfect example for us of how to feel peace and good will. The circumstances of His life were anything but tranquil. His world was politically unstable. He and His family experienced life under Roman rule and a Jewish king who wanted Jesus dead. Jesus was challenged and criti-

cized. He felt hunger, fatigue, sorrow, temptation, and frustration. He was mocked, abandoned, and betrayed. In the world where Jesus lived there were problems in families and people had severe illness, injuries, and tragic losses. Neighbors were not always kind to one another, at times business was bad, salt lost its savor, and occasionally folks ran out of refreshments during wedding receptions; and yet every incident we have recorded of the Savior's life points to a life of peace.

When Christ was in situations where He was challenged, confronted, or pestered, we read of a man who stood firm and unshaken. When He rebuked individuals who needed correction, His words were measured and delivered with the precise level of emotion to bring about the desired result. During the events leading to the Crucifixion, Jesus Christ did not shrink. I love the account where Christ was taken into custody and Peter, the loyal Apostle, drew his sword and cut off the ear of one of the high priest's servants. Jesus did not use the opportunity to run, nor to feel smug that someone else might suffer a fraction of what He had and would endure. He also did not criticize Peter. With a few of what I would characterize gentle words to Peter, He simply touched the servant's ear and healed him.<sup>11</sup> We have no evidence Jesus was ever out of control; instead, in all things He displayed peace.

As for finding evidence of a person who possessed good will, there has never been another person whose entire life reflected benevolence more completely than Jesus Christ. At the lowest level of good will, I believe we simply think kindly or hope the best for others. At the highest level of good will, I believe we have charity. At some point in the middle I think we are service oriented. It appears Jesus never acted without considering the impact of His behavior on others. He comforted, gave hope, taught, healed the sick, and raised the dead. We know the Savior possessed charity; He provided us with the Atonement.

In fact, He possessed charity so perfectly that when Mormon defined the word *charity* as “the pure love of Christ,”<sup>12</sup> he listed Jesus in the definition.

Having peace all of the time sounds like a noble project. Knowing that restrictions apply to having peace, though, means that you and I, who could use an additional measure of it in our lives, need to be striving to live in a way that qualifies us. Becoming a person of constant good will and feeling peace more consistently can be problematic for a person like me. I looked in the BYU Bookstore and did not find a book titled *Peace for Dummies*. Since I know Jesus is a good example of being a person who possesses good will and enjoys peace in His life 100 percent of the time, I looked for clues in His life that might help me and you on our quest for the same.

My first realization is very simple. Jesus knows who He is. One experience from His life that gives us a bit of insight into this occurred in the temple when Jesus was 12 years old. After celebrating the Passover with His family, Jesus went to the temple to talk to the learned men of the day. His family had left Jerusalem and was on the way back to Nazareth. It wasn't until the family had been traveling for a day that Joseph and Mary discovered Jesus was missing from their numbers and returned to find Him. The worried parents had to travel the day's journey back to Jerusalem, and then it took them an additional two days of searching before they located Him in the temple talking to “the doctors.”<sup>13</sup> When Mary and Joseph finally located Jesus in the temple, Mary asked Jesus in a tone I imagine was a little sharp and a lot relieved:

*Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.*

*And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*<sup>14</sup>

My second realization is equally simple and connected to the first. Not only was Jesus clear about who He is, He also understood why He was here on the earth and who He was to become. The knowledge of Jesus that He was the literal offspring of our Heavenly Father and that His role in life was to bring immortality and the possibility of eternal life to all of His spiritual siblings framed every aspect of Jesus Christ's mortal life. He was so clear about His divinity and His role in our Heavenly Father's plan that every decision Jesus made and every behavior He displayed was consistent with His knowledge. Nothing He ever did or said disqualified Him from being the perfect, sin-free, unblemished sacrificial lamb of the Most High God.

I have sung “I Am a Child of God”<sup>15</sup> since I was a young child, and yet it has taken me longer than Jesus to figure out that as a daughter of God I need to keep my decisions, behaviors, and words consistent with the roles my Father would have me fill on this earth and in eternity.

My son loves animals. At five years of age, two of his favorite places are Hogle Zoo in Salt Lake City and the Monte L. Bean Museum here on campus. Until recently he did not know the official names of those places, and he would distinguish between them by calling one “the live zoo” and the other “the dead zoo.” He has informed me that he wants to be a zookeeper when he grows up. He spends hours playing with the toy animals we have in our collection—setting them up, assembling similar animals into family groups, creating safe and comfortable places for them to live and sleep. In his play he is developing skills and trying to act in ways he thinks are appropriate for a role he intends to fulfill at some time in the future.

There are many roles each of us will fulfill during our lives. In addition, we know as sons and daughters of our Father in Heaven that we have the ability to someday become gods and goddesses. Jesus Christ lived His life as our

Savior long before He stepped into the Garden of Gethsemane or emerged from the tomb. Even when we think it might be in the distant future, it is not too early for us to develop now the characteristics and skills, like peace and good will, that will help us take on those roles.

It is always exciting at the beginning of each new school year to see new students come to campus. One of the most fulfilling parts of the work we do in Residence Life is to see the progress students make in solidifying their understanding of who they are and then acting according to that understanding. We enjoy being a part of students' lives while they are building their character. I have a special place in my heart for the few students who may stumble a bit and then catch the vision of their great divine potential and blossom.

Over the years of my service at the university I have observed good will through quiet acts of service students do for each other in the halls and in their apartments off campus. On a number of occasions I have been told of groups of students who have banded together to send a student without the means home for the Christmas break. A couple of years ago a close family member of one of our students committed suicide. The student's floor mates gathered and read *Ensign* articles about suicide so they could better support their friend when he returned from the funeral. I know when one student was seriously injured, the people on her floor—some who hardly knew her—gathered quickly to pray for her. The list of these simple acts of good will goes on and on. These students and so many others like them are examples to me of people who understand who they are and are living their lives in a way that qualifies them to feel peace.

While having an understanding of who you are and who you are to become and striving to have good will in your heart will allow you to feel peace, one surefire way to mess it up is to become distracted and to behave in ways that are not congruent with your divine nature.

This brings me to the third realization I want to share today. Once again the lesson is very simple, and again the example I have comes from the life of the Savior. Another way to refer to behaviors that are unbecoming of someone with a divine and royal destiny is through the word *sin*. Jesus Christ successfully avoided sin, and He did it by managing temptation in His life.

Before you discount the possibility of managing temptation and avoiding sin as unique to Jesus because of His divine parentage, allow me to remind you of what He inherited from His mortal mother. From Mary, Jesus inherited the potential for death, both physical and spiritual. Jesus felt temptation: "He suffered temptations but gave no heed unto them."<sup>16</sup> President Howard W. Hunter said, "It is important to remember that Jesus was capable of sinning, . . . but . . . he remained true. . . . He had to retain the capacity and ability to sin had he willed so to do."<sup>17</sup>

Two rather small details from the scriptures provide us with insights on how Christ successfully responded to temptation. In the account of the time Jesus Christ was tempted by Satan, Matthew wrote, "And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."<sup>18</sup> The minor point that I am convinced has critical importance is that Satan approached Christ: "the tempter came to him." Christ was not out looking for Satan.

Then, following the three temptations that Satan exposed our Savior to, Jesus simply dispatched Satan with the words "Get thee hence, Satan."<sup>19</sup> None of the Savior's responses to the temptations engaged Satan in conversation. He did not flirt with the possibility of actually going along with Satan. He did not ask anyone for clarification about how close to the line He could get before a sin would actually be committed and He never claimed it was His right to experience some fun or indulge



Himself before He had to get serious about preparing for His future role.

My smallest daughter and I enjoy doing finger plays. One finger play we do over and over is about five little monkeys who swing in the trees teasing Mr. Alligator and jeering, “You can’t catch me!” Each of the five monkeys teases Mr. Alligator in turn. In the end of the finger play, Mr. Alligator is the only one left. We laugh as we end the play about Mr. Alligator, who is “just as full as he could be.”

It is not a laughing matter when I learn of students who have felt somehow indestructible and who have teased and flirted with Satan by engaging in behaviors that are not absolutely congruent with who they are and who they are supposed to become.

One student came to BYU from out of state. During high school she had distinguished herself among her friends as an individual with high standards. Then she met some people in Provo who were not unlike the students she had gone to school with back home. Over time her evening activities became dances and parties where Y Sparkle and BYU brownies were not the refreshments of choice. To fit into this crowd of people, clothing was worn in a more provocative manner. Early on, the rationalization given for the behaviors was that technically she had not broken any of the commandments. As time went on, the flirting with Satan became a more committed relationship.

This young woman was intelligent. Her grades and test scores qualified her for admission into BYU. She had a track record of being a committed member of the Church. She was not exceptionally different from any of us. Intellectual ability and confidence in our moral strength do not prevent us from being the special sort of stupid that lets us think we can tease Satan and not be caught—like the monkeys swinging in the trees.

Sin distracts us and blurs our vision. The young woman lost sight of who she was and who she was to become. She blamed others

for her situation, and good will dried up. Her life became void of peace. I lost contact with the young woman when she went home to get her life back on track. It would take effort, the help of her ecclesiastical leader, support from her family, and a commitment on her part to fully utilize the blessing of the Atonement—the ultimate gift of our Redeemer—to restore the feeling of peace in her life.

As you know, sin is not the only distraction we can experience in our lives. At times the hectic nature of our responsibilities, concerns we have, and trials we experience can distract us too. Although there are days we may wish our lives were less chaotic and our responsibilities and pressures would go away, we must be realistic and understand that these things will always be around us. We may wish the world would become a perfect reflection of good will, but we must realize that it is not likely to happen soon. While we strive to live our lives as Jesus did, our efforts will and do fall short and we have need to repent over and over. Chaos, pressures, and sin are part of our lives. The angels knew this when they pronounced peace on the earth more than 2,000 years ago. If we can follow the Lord’s example of knowing who we are and living our lives in a way that is congruent with our current status as children of our Eternal Father and our future status as gods and goddesses, we will indeed have good will in our hearts. Hopefully we can do a better job of avoiding sin by removing ourselves from situations where we are flirting with Satan.

Developing an understanding of who we are, learning to live according to that understanding, avoiding sin, and repenting when we fail—and figuring out how to be individuals with good will in our hearts—are all part of the reason we are here on this earth. Jesus Christ came to the earth and is our example in all things; He learned who He was, lived according to that understanding, avoided sin, and was an individual of supreme good will. The

Christmas bells Henry Wadsworth Longfellow heard will ring again this year celebrating the birth of our Savior, "The Prince of Peace."<sup>20</sup>

We are reminded again of the pronouncement of the heavenly host. That we will have good will in our hearts, that the restrictions will not apply to us, and that we will feel the promised peace now and always is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. Luke 2:14.
2. *Funk & Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary*, 1977, s.v. "good will," 576.
3. See William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 319.
4. Isaiah 57:21.
5. "Choose the Right," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 239.
6. See Charles C. Calhoun, *Longfellow: A Rediscovered Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 228–29.
7. See Calhoun, *Longfellow*, 215–20.
8. See Calhoun, *Longfellow*, 191.
9. See Calhoun, *Longfellow*, 114–18.
10. "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 214.
11. See Luke 22:50–51, John 18:10–11.
12. Moroni 7:47.
13. Luke 2:42–46.
14. Luke 2:48–49.
15. "I Am a Child of God," *Songbook*, 1995, 2–3.
16. D&C 20:22.
17. Howard W. Hunter, "The Temptations of Christ," *Ensign*, November 1976, 19.
18. Matthew 4:3.
19. Matthew 4:10.
20. Isaiah 9:6.

