

Appreciate Your Opportunities

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I'm here today physically subdued from an interesting afternoon and evening in swinging an ax and pushing a saw in the snow at Aspen Grove, but I'm built up to an exultation of spirit and emotion through that great experience. David Grayson wrote, "It is not the time of the day nor the turn of the season nor yet the way of the wind that matters most to us, but the ardor and glow we ourselves bring to the fragrant earth. It is a sad thing to reflect that, in a world so overflowing with goodness of smell or fine sights and sweet sounds, we pass by hastily and take so little of them. Days pass when we see no beautiful sights, hear no sweet sounds, smell no memorable odor, when we exchange no single word of deeper understanding with a friend. We have lived a day and added nothing to our lives."

On our way to and from Aspen Grove we passed hunters, all of them driving slowly and looking forlornly at the hillside. I personally was not sorry to see them looking so forlorn. Of course it is a proper sport, and the proper season. I think more of fishing, and have spent some successful time on the river. You may know of the man in Arkansas, described in the *Arkansas Gazette*, who went fishing at a place called Lee's Ferry on September 22, 1972, caught a few fish, and lost his wedding band.

It was a matter of sore concern at his house. One year later on September 22, 1973, fishing in exactly the same place, he caught a fourteen-inch trout. While he was opening that trout with his sharp knife, the knife struck something solid. It was his thumb. Well, things are not always what they seem.

Now, I'd like to qualify my being here today. I didn't come for just another meeting, of course. I really feel like the Englishman who watched his first game of American football, saw all those huddles, and said, "Seems like an interesting game. I think I could learn to like it, but they hold too many committee meetings." I didn't come, we didn't come, to see the local attractions.

I was reading the other day about the archbishop of Canterbury who was warned about the American news media. Upon arrival he met a group of these interesting people who asked him questions. One said, "Archbishop, do you intend to visit the night clubs in New York?"

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Warily he answered, "Oh, are there night clubs in New York?"

The next day the paper printed the story: "The first question the archbishop of Canterbury asked upon arriving in New York was, 'Are there night clubs in New York?'"

I'm not here today to see anything except you, really, though I certainly enjoyed the beauty of the sky and the mountains on my way here.

There is one other preliminary to the major message of my intent. That is a preliminary message which is entirely appropriate here. It came from the Tucson newspaper known to many of you, I am sure, and was in reference to a headline published over an article about the necessary discharge of a number of state employees because of budgetary limitations. The headline said: "Whom shall be fired first?" A letter to the editor said, quoting that headline, "Whom shall be fired first? That's easy. *Whom* wrote the headline, *him* shall be fired first. Him doesn't know enough good English grammar to hold the job he has."

Well, I didn't come to teach much that's new, either, and I'll therefore tell you why I'm here. I came because I like to come and so accepted the invitation. I like to get the feel of this place. Someone has written, "New leaves do not come because old leaves are falling. Old leaves fall because new leaves are coming." You are the new leaves. We look with optimism to your coming and bid you remember with Charlie Brown that there is no heavier burden than great potential.

Information and Appreciation

I came to deliver a nosegay of flowers collected along the road, tying together these blossoms with the frail thread of my understanding, acceptance, conviction, and appreciation. I'd like to begin what I have to say with a quotation from a hero of mine whose name is Abraham Heschel. He is gone now but was

a great rabbi and teacher. Abraham Heschel wrote:

Two things a man needs—information and appreciation. Now when I look at our educational system and many other institutions for civilization, I see a tremendous emphasis upon information, but hardly any cultivation of the sense of appreciation. Unless there is appreciation there is no mankind. The great marvel of being alive is the ability to discover the mystery and wonder of everything. The real dignity of anything that is, is in its relationship to God Who created it. Unless we learn how to revere, we will not know how to exist as human beings.

For what information and appreciation shall we seek? Let me share a story you may have heard. If so, you will appreciate it more, and if not, it will be a thoughtful experience. An older man and a young man were drifting in a rowboat on a quiet lake, beneath the earthen dam that formed the lake. They had newly become friends. The older man, as they talked, picked up a leaf from the surface of the lake. He said, "Son, do you know very much about biology?"

The young man said, "I'm afraid I don't, sir."

"Well," he said, "You've lost 25 percent of your life."

They went a little farther and the older man took from the bottom of the boat a rock. He held it up, examined it, and said to the younger man, "Son, do you know very much about geology?"

He said, a little embarrassed, "no sir, I'm afraid I don't."

"Well," he said, "you've lost 50 percent of your life."

As they drifted it became dusk and the first evening star appeared. The older man asked, "son, do you know very much about astronomy?"

He said, "I'm embarrassed to tell you, sir, that I don't."

The older man answered, with a smile, "You've missed 75 percent of your life."

They drifted a little longer and then, sensing some unusual current in the water beneath them, looked up and saw coming at them a huge wall of water from the dam, which had burst. The young man said, "Sir, do you know how to swim?"

He said, "No, I'm afraid I don't."

"Well," said the boy, "you're about to lose all of your life."

A leaf, a rock, a star, swimming, biology, geology, astronomy—all are wonderful. It would be wonderful if each of us had a broad enough base in the laws of nature and the basics of science and the facts of history and the principles of philosophy to be interested in and understand in a measure the great advances being made around us. This knowledge contributes richness to life and perhaps to making a living, but more important than any of it, central to all of it, giving it all meaning and coherence, is information about and appreciation of man himself, of his relationships with others and with God, and of his understanding of origins and heritage and possibilities, responsibilities, and an everlasting future. Let me look at two or three matters of appreciation selected out of a multitude I've been turning over in my mind the last few hours.

Appreciation for Life

Appreciate life. Grayson's comment about ardor is complemented for me by something I heard from two wonderful psychologists, a husband-and-wife team, teaching a group of adults a long time ago. Out of all that they said, much of which I remember, one thought is foremost in my mind: "Nor heaven nor hell can him surprise, who loves his home, and loves the rain, and looks on life with quiet eyes."

You may have heard the last interview recorded with Dr. Tom Dooley before he died of leukemia. He had given the young years

of his medical career, when he could have been making a lot of money, to the people of Indochina. These two or three sentences constituted the valedictory, of sorts, of Tom Dooley. Said the questioner, "Dr. Dooley, you are living on borrowed time, yet your contributions to humanity seem to take no account of the trials you personally are called upon to bear."

"Yes," he said (this conversation was replayed the day he died), "I am living on borrowed time. So are you; so is every man who walks this earth. I may live to be as old as you are now; I may not live to see my next birthday. This does not matter. What really counts is what I do in terms of human good with the days, the weeks, the months or the years allotted to me by my creator." Appreciate life.

Appreciation for Others

Appreciate others and be respectful of their values. I was called upon to pray at a public gathering a few days ago and found myself without premeditation thanking God for the qualities of gentility and civility and caring which permit people of diverse points of view and diverse ways of living to be together in an atmosphere of courtesy and graciousness. I've thought about that since. I think the Lord blessed me to say that. It certainly was consonant with how I feel and what I would like my life to represent. Do you remember the words of the great apostle who encouraged all of us to "honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17)? We also read of the Prophet, under the inspiration of God, preceding the marvelous words "let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly" with the admonition that we be filled with love toward all men, and to the household of faith (see D&C 121:45). This message is repeated again and again. I wonder if we always are sensitive to it.

Do you know the story of Mike Gold? I didn't until a year or so ago.

In the 1920s, the philosopher of American communism was a Jew named Mike Gold. After communism fell into general disrepute in this country, Mike Gold became a man of oblivion. In this oblivion he wrote a book, A Jew Without Knowing It. In describing his childhood in New York City, he tells of his mother's instructions never to wander beyond four certain streets. She could not tell him that it was a Jewish ghetto. She could not tell him that he had the wrong kind of blood in his veins. . . .

In his narration, Mike Gold tells of the day that curiosity lured him beyond the four streets, outside of his ghetto, and of how he was accosted by a group of older boys who asked him a puzzling question: "Hey, kid, are you a kike?" "I don't know." He had never heard that word before. The older boys came back with a paraphrase of their question. "Are you a Christ-killer?" Again, the small boy responded, "I don't know." He had never heard that word either. So the older boys asked him where he lived, and trained like most small boys to recite their address in case of being lost, Mike Gold told them where he lived. "So you are a kike; you are a Christ-killer. Well you're in Christian territory and we are Christians. We're going to teach you to stay where you belong!" And so they beat the little boy, bloodied his face and tore his clothes and sent him home to the jeering litany: "We are Christians and you killed Christ! Stay where you belong! We are Christians, and you killed Christ." . . .

*When he arrived home, Mike Gold was asked by his frightened mother: "What happened to you, Mike?" He could answer only: "I don't know." "Who did this to you, Mike?" Again he answered: "I don't know." And so the mother washed the blood from the face of her little boy and put him into fresh clothes and took him into her lap as she sat in a rocker, and tried to soothe him. Mike Gold recalled so much later in life that he raised his small battered lips to the ears of his mother and asked: "Mama, who is Christ?" [John Powell, *Why Am I Afraid to Love*, pp. 114–16]*

I read from the Book of Mormon:

And now, my brethren, I have spoken to you concerning pride; and those of you which have afflicted your neighbor, and persecuted him because ye were proud in your hearts, of the things which God hath given you, what say ye of it?

Do ye not suppose that such things are abominable unto him who created all flesh? And the one being is as precious in his sight as the other. And all flesh is of the dust; and for the selfsame end hath he created them, that they should keep his commandments and glorify him forever. [Jacob 2:20–21]

Do you remember Shaw's *Pygmalion*? One of the lines from this play is "the difference between a flower girl and a lady is not how she behaves but how she is treated." When I think of another sentence from Abraham Heschel. "Holocausts," he said, "are caused not only by atomic explosions; holocausts are caused whenever a person is put to shame."

Appreciation for Yourself

Appreciate your own special spiritual heritage and value. I read in a wonderful Christian-Protestant magazine a little while ago a somewhat strange, and to me sorrowful, statement: "Like all other institutions of liberal Protestantism, this magazine is suffering from an erosion of self-confidence. There is a pervasive feeling that we no longer have anything particularly distinctive to offer by way of religious insight." In this world, where the Lord needs every strong heart and devoted hand and tongue he can find, I think that's very sad indeed.

What I'm saying to you is that we need to appreciate the special heritage and values that have come to us. Think for a moment what particularly distinctive insight the kingdom of God offers you in these matters: God, Christ, man, life, sex, marriage, family, resurrection, eternity. Special instruction has been given to us concerning conservation, pollution, liberation, population, elections, freedom, abortion, government, Christ. In these and many other

very important principles, programs, doctrines, and matters, there are distinctive, special insights we have to share. But just knowing that or hearing it doesn't really suffice, does it? We must learn to understand these insights and become really converted to them, and to act on them.

I wish it were appropriate to tell you all the details of a conversation I once had with a young lady, a lovely person, who was professionally qualified in a certain field. I would not want you to know those details, so I simply share a headline. She was about to make a decision that would influence her and her generations. She came into my office reluctantly, but she came because both she and I loved her parents. She was not really interested in anything I had to say and acknowledged it openly when I asked her. I said to her, "When did you last do any serious reading about the Church?"

"Oh," she said a bit blithely, "in the ninth grade. We were reading the Book of Mormon. I quit, though."

I said, "Did you also quit praying and going to church?"

"Yes," she said.

"And pretty soon you stopped living the life of the Church?"

"Yes."

I said, "I really just have one other question to ask you. The new Church Office Building is about ready to be completed—all those many stories. Your speciality will be involved in its completion. I'd like to do what I could to get you the job to work on that great building. Would you like that?"

Looking a little dubious, she said, "Well, sure!"

I said, "All right, I think I can do it on one condition. You agree to perform your professional speciality on that building on the basis of what you knew about it in the ninth grade."

She looked a long time at the floor before the teardrops came, and she said, "Oh, Brother

Hanks, I'm in terrible trouble. Can you help me?"

I said, "Yes, I think I can now."

To learn and then to act. I know a man who as a bishop won an award for his great skills and success in training teachers who work among underprivileged people. Some of his fellow teachers who knew him and knew the quality of his record and the nature of his life and his attitude toward his fellowmen said, "We just don't get it. How can you, being a Mormon, do the kind of work you do?"

He said, "You really don't get it, do you? I do the kind of work I do precisely because I am a Mormon."

Appreciate your own particular, distinctive heritage and the religious insights which it offers.

I stood under an awning one day, low in spirit, soaked by the rain. I had some law books under my arm, and they had been soaked, also. There were a lot of other problems on my shoulders, problems concerning people I loved very much, and other demands made on me, and many Church assignments. I hardly knew where to turn, and I really was depressed. There were two others under the awning who I did not at first even notice in my preoccupation with my own problems, but I couldn't keep from hearing them speaking to each other. One said—she was a beautiful person, very near the birth of a child—to her friend, "How are things going with you?"

She said, "Just fine, but we can't find an apartment. Have you found one yet, with the baby coming?"

"Oh, yes," said the pregnant girl, "we found one."

The other said, "You did? How could you? We've looked and looked."

"Oh," she said, "We did, too. Bob and I looked till we were exhausted, and then, having tried as hard as we could, we fasted and prayed for a couple of days and he went out and found a nice place."

“Oh,” said the other. And I stood feeling ashamed, remembering some things I hadn’t even thought of for a while.

Appreciation for Humility

Appreciate the importance of being humble. Do you remember the wonderful words of an anguished father recorded in scripture? “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24). Do you remember the wonderful line about matters of greater consequence—“weightier matters” the Lord called them—judgment, mercy, and faith (see Matthew 23:23)? Do you remember the wonderful man who knew how to treat his neighbor, who knew how to love God and his fellowman though he wasn’t a member of the kingdom? The Savior said to him, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34). There was something more he had to do, but he had the spirit and the meaning. And do you remember the Pharisee and the publican, the one so congratulatory over his religious rigidities, and the other who “would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13)?

Out of literature a long time ago I extracted a sentence I hope I can remember. A young priest was about to leave his calling because he saw injustice, an older priest encouraging him to remain because he saw true Christian strength in the youth. He said to the younger man, “You have inquisitiveness and tenderness. You are sensible to the distinction between thinking and doubting. And best of all, you do not have that bumptious security which springs from dogma rather than from faith” (A. J. Cronin, *Keys of the Kingdom*). In the name and worship of Jesus Christ we should be humble.

Appreciation for Responsibility

Two other suggestions and I’m through. Appreciate the responsibility of being an

individual in an organized society, a person and a social being with responsibility to others. Avoid, I pray you, that lone-eagle complex that makes some people say, “It’s my life and I’m going to live it. I’m going to do what I want to do in spite of what it does to anybody else, what effect it has on anyone else.”

Do you remember Niemoller’s interesting bequeathment—he who got along for a time with the Nazis and finally was imprisoned? “They came after the Jews, and I was not a Jew so I did not object. Then they came after the Catholics, and I was not a Catholic so I did not object. Then they came after the trade unionists. I was not a trade unionist so I did not object. Then they came after me, and there was nobody left to object.”

Christ asked, at the end of a story well known to all of us, “Which one of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves?” (Luke 10:36). Six hundred or more years before that Jeremiah had asked, “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” (Lamentations 1:12).

Appreciation for Covenants

Appreciate, please, the need we all have to keep the pledges we have made. Sister Hanks and I were at the tomb of Gandhi in India. We read there a few words that I have treasured since—words about pledges, words that I have found mirrored within the standard works and my own covenants and the memory of them reflected in the little piece of bread and the cup of water we take on the Sabbath. Gandhi said: “Even for life itself we may not do certain things. There is only one course open to me, to die but never to break my pledge. . . . How can I control others if I cannot control myself?” I remind you to be grateful for your pledges, and to keep them. I exemplify my pledges in an experience I once had. In a small town I had a talk with a lovely young woman about an opportunity she desired and now felt ready for. We were talking about her qualifications.

She was candid and humble and gentle and forthright, anxious for her great opportunity. As we finished, I said to her, "Does anyone else know about the problem that makes this conversation necessary?"

She said, "My bishop and my stake president and my parents."

I said (and I have more often felt blessed by the Spirit to ask a question than in answering one), "What was the reaction of your parents when you told them?"

She said, "My father put his arms around me and wept. He said, 'Ah, sweetheart, how could you carry this heavy burden alone without us to help?'"

I said, "Was that his first response? Was that his reaction?"

She said, "Yes."

I said, "Do you know how blessed you are? Could I have the honor of meeting your father before we leave here?"

The arrangement was made. I said to him, "If I can express in my own life the maturity of Christian understanding of the gospel that you have, I will be very grateful."

I bid you remember that, please. It is important to have that quality of character, and that kind of mature understanding of what it is really all about, and that kind of love. I see

that as an appreciation of what God really expects us to grow to and is pulling for us to accomplish.

This is a good place to stop, save one, and that one is a scripture:

And now I, Moroni, bid farewell unto the Gentiles, yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love, until we shall meet before the judgment-seat of Christ. . . .

And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things. [Ether 12:38–39]

And I join Moroni in this invitation:

And now, I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever. [Ether 12:41]

This is his work. I think to learn of it and appreciate it is the main undertaking and highest blessing of us all, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.