

That We May Prepare to Do Our Part

ARDETH G. KAPP

A few weeks ago I was at Dick's Market shopping for groceries as we all do. A young lady reaching for a head of lettuce just as I was looked up in surprise and said, "Do you buy groceries?" I smiled and said, "Yes, and I eat them too."

On Stage for a Season

We are all so ordinary, and yet each is special and unique. It is when we come to know that we are literally brothers and sisters in the same family away from our heavenly home for a time that we begin to really recognize each other—not in relation to positions, possessions, prestige, or power, but rather as brothers and sisters, heart to heart and soul to soul. And then when we meet we don't exchange just words—a wonderful exchange of the spirit takes place. We learn to share and trust and risk and become not so concerned about what we do but rather with who we are and, even more important, whose we are. We begin to reveal how we feel. We laugh together and cry together and learn how to bear one another's burdens that they may be light. At least that is what we, as covenant people, hope to do. And yet at times we fall short of the mark and feel some disappointment in ourselves because we are not always doing as well as we could or

should or would given another chance. And it's so good to have friends who know you and believe in you and give you another chance.

But above all, it is important for you to know you and me to know me. As the hymn suggests, "Let each man learn to know himself; To gain that knowledge let him labor" ("Let Each Man Learn to Know Himself," *Hymns*, 1948, no. 91).

On occasion, when we conduct a private and sometimes sobering interview with ourselves, we recognize the distance between the ideal and the real. It humbles us and increases our desire for an improved performance, given the wonderful gift of another day. We all hope for the final commendation of our performance: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Prior to the opening of the fall season for the musical play *Annie* at the Promised Valley Playhouse some years ago, 320 girls auditioned for the part of Annie. Twelve dogs were brought by proud owners hoping their dog might be selected to be Annie's companion,

Ardeth G. Kapp was the Young Women general president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside talk was given at Brigham Young University on 4 June 1989.

Sandy. Not everyone who tried out got a part, and some how got parts didn't get the ones they thought they wanted.

However, following a period of intensive rehearsals, the opening night was absolutely spectacular. But as magnificent as Annie's performance was under the spotlight on the stage before a packed house, her greatest moment, I believe, was after the show. Following a standing ovation, this young girl graciously acknowledged the praises from admirers crowded in the lobby of the theater. In the corner near the door I observed an elderly gray-haired gentleman stooped with age, his eyes moist, eagerly searching the crowd. Somehow, through a small opening in the crowd, Annie caught a glimpse of the old man. Forgetting all the public acclaim and with arms outstretched, she called, "Grandpa, Grandpa." The crowd parted, leaving a narrow passageway for this precious moment. Stooped as he was, the elderly man reached out his arms like parentheses and nestled his young and precious granddaughter close to him, his gray hair falling against her curly red hair and their arms entwined around each other. He spoke softly. The audience was hushed. Although I could not hear, I think he must have said, "My dear, my dear, you played your part so very, very well."

Since that memorable occasion, I have replayed that final scene over and over in my mind a hundred times or more and contemplated the greeting we will each receive following our final performance. We are all on stage for a time. This is not the first or the final act. This is the second act. And we have been assured that we performed our first act very, very well. Concerning the second, our Father in Heaven has said,

And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them;

And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; . . . and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever. [Abraham 3:25–26]

As each of us participates in this great drama of earth life, we often find the parts we so much desire may not be available to us for a time. We find ourselves placed in other roles, only to discover after some years and after the trial of our faith that those "other roles" may even be the very ones we auditioned for—roles for which we received coaching and divine guidance from our Heavenly Father before we left our heavenly home to come onstage for a season.

President George Q. Cannon gives us great insight as he explains that

God has chosen us out of the world and has given us a great mission. I do not entertain a doubt myself that we were selected and foreordained for the mission before the world was, that we had our parts allotted to us in this mortal state of existence as our Savior had His assigned to Him. [Gospel Truth, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1974), p.22]

In the production of *Annie*, Sandy, the dog, broke loose, missed his cue, entered too soon, and came in from the wings center stage. He could have spoiled the show, but Annie came to the rescue and helped him wait until it was his time to enter.

As participants on the stage of life, we too must be sensitive to the timing and must work to support each other. There are times that some will, for a brief moment, move center stage in front of the lights, then backstage or even offstage into the wings for a time, confident that the entire cast will participate in the final curtain call.

I believe the sensitivity we each have for another's part, major or minor, will have a tremendous impact on the quality of our

individual and final performance. And it is often in the supportive roles that we see the finest and most magnificent examples.

This analogy of being onstage with a particular part is not intended to suggest that we perform as puppets on a string. That would violate the basic doctrine of agency that is so critical to the very purpose of this earth life. And yet many young people I talk to, and sometimes older ones, have a mistaken idea that they should wait for a prompting of the Spirit on every decision. If things go well, the Spirit prompted them to do this or that, and if things go well, the devil made them do it.

President Brigham Young gives us some great insight into our responsibility for choosing well. He said,

God is the author of all good; and yet, if you rightly understood yourselves, you would not directly attribute every good act you perform to our Father in heaven, nor to his Son Jesus Christ, nor to the Holy Ghost; neither would you attribute every evil act of a man or woman to the Devil or his spirits or influences; for man is organized by his Creator to act perfectly independently of all influences there are above or beneath. Those influences are always attending him, and are ready to dictate and direct—to lead him into truth or to lead him to destruction. But is he always guided by those influences in every act? He is not. It is ordained of God that we should act independently in and of ourselves, and the good is present when we need it. If we will ask for it, it is with us. [JD 9:122]

We are responsible! President George Q. Cannon wrote,

It is true that some have greater power of resistance than others, but everyone has the power to close his heart against doubt, against darkness, against unbelief, against depression, against anger, against hatred, against jealousy, against malice, against envy. God has given this power unto all of us, and we can gain still greater power by calling upon Him

for that which we lack. If it were not so, how could we be condemned for giving way to wrong influences?

There could be no condemnation for our doing what we could not help; but we can help doing these things. [Gospel Truth, p. 19]

We are always at liberty to ad-lib and be distracted by seemingly more exciting parts. Some of us may spend too much time (which is our life) in the costume and wardrobe department selecting, designing, modeling, combining this with that, including all of the accessories, and as a result miss our cue.

For some of us, it may not be the costumes that distract us. It may be the props, the scenery, the set, the furniture—like cars and stereos, skis and VCRs—that, although important in their place, pale by comparison to the joy that comes from touching another's life in some quiet, small act of service. Would we ever let our things stand in the way of the joy that service brings when we share our lives with others?

It Is Easy to Be Distracted

Even as we endeavor to play our various parts in their appropriate seasons, there will continually be self-appointed stage managers who, not knowing or caring about the script, will shout from the wings, "You're playing the wrong part. You don't want the supporting role. That isn't important. Why be a supporting actor when you can be a star? Be front stage. Move in. Let them know who you are. This is your chance to win the applause."

There are those who would attempt to revise, rewrite, and restructure the script, changing the sacred roles of men and women, modifying the scenes and seasons, adjusting the morals and models where possible, and even altering the main stage, the home, in which the most important drama of life should unfold.

There are always loud voices assuming authorship while abdicating stewardship. You and I may never win an Academy Award, and society may never know us beyond the street where we live. And some of us, because of a calling or position, may be in the public eye more than others. But I am sure that when the lights have gone out and the curtain is closed on our second act, the opinions of others, the acceptance and the applause of the crowd, will be haunting echoes if our Father's approval is in question.

For many years I have carried in my wallet a copy of a statement by Leslie Weatherhead as a reminder of the perfect example:

*When I am tempted to listen to hot, egotistic voices within my own heart; when it seems that love can never win but always loses; when it seems as though humility is ruthlessly trodden down by those who pass over it on their way to their own selfish ambitions; when it seems as though God cannot possibly triumph; when pity and love and mercy and kindness and tenderness are weakness; when it seems as though greatness is only possessed by those who know how to grab, and have the power to snatch at it, no matter what the cost to others—ah, yes, when the voices sound in my own heart which say you must play for your own hand, you must think of number one, you must not let yourself be trodden down—when I am thus tempted, my God! May I hear in imagination the tinkling of water, poured into a basin, and see, as in a vision, the Son of God washing the disciple's feet. [Leslie D. Weatherhead, *Eternal Voice* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1940), pp. 81–82]*

It won't matter if we play center stage or in the wings if our Lord and Savior is at the very center of our life. He reaches out to use with this promise: "Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not. Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet; be faithful, keep my

commandments, and ye shall inherit the kingdom of heaven" (D&C 6:36–37).

President Kimball has given us a guide to help keep us focused in our daily rehearsals. He said, "Since immortality and eternal life constitutes the sole purpose of life, all other interests and activities are but incidental thereto" (Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969], p. 2).

And Alma reminds us, "This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God: yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors" (Alma 34:32). Our labors come in a variety of ways.

The other evening I was visiting with a young woman in her early twenties. She poured out her heart saying, "If I was just pretty, then I'd feel more confident." Let me say here that even if at one time you have that youthful beauty, it will fade with age. My friend gives comfort by reminding me that as your eyesight wanes, you don't look so bad when you can't see so well.

It is so easy to be distracted by vanity and pride. I believe that's one of the reasons we have over 300 references in the scriptures to the word *remember*. When we remember our parts, who we are, and whose we are, we are no longer distracted by foolish intruders. Remember Alma's question to those who would gain exaltation, "And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren [and, I might add, sisters] of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" (Alma 5:14). When this takes place, our beauty will be unsurpassed and assured.

Of course, it is appropriate that we look our best but before we become dazzled with the glamour of our outerwear, we might heed the words of Alma, "Yea, can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting

your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches?" (Alma 5:53). There are many attractive distractions that would interfere if possible with our command performance.

When we come to know who we are, something of our divine nature and our individual worth, and realize our part in the eternal plan, we will be prepared to respond as Lamoni's father did after Aaron taught him. He said, "I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy." Then he prayed, "And I will give away all my sins to know thee" (Alma 22:15, 18).

When we let go of our sins and our eye is single to the glory of God, we are promised that our whole body shall be filled with light and that there shall be no darkness in us (D&C 88:67). We will hear the still, small voice prompting us from the wings,, reminding us of our lines day by day. And even when we may question our own strength and ability, we can take comfort in the promises of the Lord when we are on his errands: "For I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up" (D&C 84:88).

On those days when we feel we aren't doing very well, we can do as Nephi did on his challenging days: "Go into the mount oft, and . . . pray oft unto the Lord; wherefore the Lord [will show] unto [us] great things" (1 Nephi 18:3). I know this can happen. I always thought it could, but I want to bear witness that I can and it does, and it will for each of you as you "ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ" (Moroni 10:4).

Those Who Mix the Mortar

As we consider our individual parts, I am impressed with the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson in his American literary essay on self-reliance;

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better or worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his bestowal on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. . . .

*What I must do is all that concerns me, not what people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder, because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude. [Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays; First Series (1841, rev. 1847), Self-Reliance*]*

The plot of ground given to us to till is not always at the center of the stage.

Some years ago my husband and I arose early in the morning wanting to arrive on the grounds of the Jordan River Temple well before the crowd that would gather for the occasion of laying the cornerstone for the magnificent edifice. Our plan was ill timed. The crowd was already there when we arrived. Due to the contour of the land, I was not only stretching to see over the heads of those in front of me, but we were on the low side of the slope in front of the temple and I couldn't see what was going on. Heber, being considerably taller, tried to ease my disappointment by reporting to me the observations from his vantage point. "The choir is assembling," he reported. "The General Authorities are taking their places. The TV cameras are in place." This only added to my frustration as I faced the backs of those in front who were seeing this historic event that I was missing.

After reaching and stretching without success to catch even a glimpse of the drama, I decided to settle down, hoping to just feel the spirit of the occasion. It was when I relaxed that I changed my perspective and was attracted by an activity at the far northeast side of the temple just beyond the corner. This became the focal point of my interest. There I observed two men dressed in dark pants, white shirts and ties. They each had a shovel. They were busily engaged around a wheelbarrow. I saw them empty sacks of concrete, pour in water, and mix the contents in the wheelbarrow. In time, after hearing the choir and the impressive messages given by the presiding authorities, Heber reported to me that the cameras were now moving from center stage to the location for the placement of the cornerstone.

I watched. At that moment the men who mixed the mortar pushed the wheelbarrow to the front of the building and then quickly disappeared behind the scenes. The cornerstone was carefully anchored in place with the mortar prepared for this important event. On the news that evening I saw what the cameras saw. But they did not see what I had seen.

Now, years later, I never drive by the Jordan River Temple, especially after dark with the bright lights shining like beacons of refuge to a darkening world, without thinking of the men who mixed the mortar—those whose quiet, unsung labors played a major role in the placement of the cornerstone for the house of the Lord in a building that will stand against all of the storms of life.

Given a choice, would you be willing to serve with the men who mix the mortar? Tonight I'd like to pay tribute to the men and women who mix the mortar, so to speak, in my life—those who so often work quietly in the wings. After twenty-seven years of continuous front-stage responsibilities in the Church, my husband was released as stake president. I wondered how life would be. Now I see him happily, joyfully, and ambitiously mixing

mortar in quiet ways that help hold life together for many who need encouragement. I am constantly inspired by his private performance. I believe there is a close correlation between mixing mortar and ministering.

In the Young Women office where I spend much of my time, I see those who quietly mix mortar every day so that nothing falls between the cracks—unsung heroines, models for my life like the men who mix the mortar. The Lord tells us,

Be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great. [D&C 64:33]

Small acts of service, small sacrifices, small notes and calls, words of encouragement one to another—these “small things” are the mortar that help hold life together.

Every Day of Our Lives

Now the routine of life may sometimes seem a little humdrum, repetitious, and routine—maybe even boring on occasions. Don't let that happen, ever. It's all right to get tired, but don't ever become bored with life. I think of the words in the poem “Renascence” by Edna St. Vincent Millay. The introductory lines reveal a very limited and narrow point of view about life—a tone of boredom, I believe. The poem begins:

*All I could see from where I stood
Was three long mountains and a wood;
I turned and looked the other way,
And saw three islands in a bay.*

. . .

*And so I looked, and, after all,
The sky was not so very tall.*

. . .

*The sky, I thought, is not so grand;
I 'most could touch it with my hand!*

She is bored with life; after all, she thinks it's not so grand.

Then she dies and finds herself finally released from the routine and monotony of life. She is deep in the earth and resting, and the rain begins to fall. From the vantage point of being down and looking up she begins to see things differently.

*Oh God, I cried, give me new birth,
And put me back upon the earth!
Upset each cloud's gigantic gourd
And let the heavy rain, down-poured
In one big torrent, set me free,
Washing my grave away from me!*

Her earnest prayer is heard. The rain comes and washes her grave away, and she is alive again, this time with eyes to see and ears to hear—able to know and understand. She says,

*And as I looked a quickening gust
Of wind blew up to me and thrust
Into my face a miracle
Of orchard-breath, and with the smell,—
I know not how such things can be!—
I breathed my soul back into me.*

*Ah! Up then from the ground sprang I
And hailed the earth with such a cry
As is not heard save from a man
Who has been dead and lives again.*

*About the trees my arms I wound;
Like one gone mad I hugged the ground;
I raised my quivering arms on high;
I laughed and laughed into the sky,
Till at my throat a strangling sob
Caught fiercely, and a great heart-throb
Sent instant tears into my eyes;
O God, I cried, no dark disguise
Can e'er hereafter hide from me
Thy radiant identity!
Thou canst not move across the grass
But my quick eyes will see Thee pass,*

*Nor speak, however silently,
But my hushed voice will answer Thee.*

She concludes,

*The world stands out on either side
No wider than the heart is wide;
Above the world is stretched the sky,—
No higher than the soul is high.
The heart can push the sea and land
Farther away on either hand;
The soul can split the sky in two,
And let the face of God shine through.*

*But East and West will pinch the heart
That cannot keep them pushed apart;
And he whose soul is flat—the sky
Will cave in on him by and by.
[“Renascence,” Edna St. Vincent Millay]*

How long has it been since you have celebrated the dawn of a new day, studied the dew on a spider web, or counted the petals on a daisy? Oh, that we might remain alive as long as we live.

At times when “my part” seems difficult and when there are more demands than I can meet, I’m forced to prioritize because I can’t do it all. Then I read again the words of our Savior in the New Testament that helps me as I try to separate the urgent demands from the vital virtues.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have loved one to another. [John 13:34–35]

Our greatest performance is when we take time to give of ourselves in love, one for another, often away from the crowd. Of the multitude of happenings during the past several years in my life, permit me to share with you what I would like to have recorded in

some quiet note on a page of history as possibly a noteworthy performance.

A few years ago, as it was nearing Christmas, I found myself confronted with a very full schedule. The streets were crowded, my calendar was crowded, and my mind was crowded. There was so much to do and so little time. An invitation to give a brief Christmas message to the residents of a nursing home nearby was one activity I could check off rather quickly and then hurriedly move to the next appointment.

As I rushed past the receptionist at the door of the nursing home, I was ushered into a large room where I suddenly stopped. Life was moving at a different pace here, if it was moving at all. There were wheelchairs, bent shoulders, gray hair, tired eyes, and the impression of so little going on. I reviewed quickly in my mind the message I had planned to share and hoped that it would fit and lift some heart, or at least be appropriate for this occasion. It was warm in the room but, in spite of this fact, many of the elderly had knitted shawls draped over rounded shoulders and woolly slippers covering tired feet.

Following my message, one of the visitors, a granddaughter of one of the elderly, asked if I would have time to visit with her grandmother in her own private room for even a few moments. She made the comment, "She thinks she knows you," indicating perhaps that her grandmother's mind might also be tired. I agreed that I could take a few moments, and I followed behind as the younger woman helped this elderly sister down the narrow hall back to her room. This dear lady reached her bedside, then shuffled haltingly as she turned around, let go of her granddaughter, and dropped onto the side of her bed. She then raised her head so that I could look into her face. My eyes caught hers. "Sister Myrtle Dudley," I said, "you were my Primary teacher."

The wrinkles on her face formed a smile as she pulled on her granddaughter's jacket and

said, "See, I told you she would know me."

I continued, "I remember when you used to lead the singing. You wore that wine-colored dress with the big sleeves that waved back and forth as you taught us the songs."

Again she pulled on her granddaughter's jacket. "I told you she would know me."

"Yes," I said, "and you made carrot juice for my mother when she was sick."

Then she asked, "Did you come all the way from Canada just to see me?"

"Oh, Sister Dudley," I said, "I have come a long way. It has been over forty years." She then reached out her arms and drew me close to her. I felt like a child once again, back in Primary, in the arms of my teacher who loved me.

Then she whispered in my ear, "I knew you would know me."

There in the arms of my Primary teacher the world stood still for a moment. The busy streets were forgotten. The crowded calendar was no longer pressing on my mind. The spirit of Christmas filled my soul. A small miracle was taking place, not because of what I brought but because of what I had received.

After a time, I reluctantly and thoughtfully left the presence of my Primary teacher and walked slowly back to my car. I sat there pondering while the snowflakes of the season fell gently on the windshield that was piling high with snow. It was the season of celebration for the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. It was he who asked us to love one another and to serve one another. He said to each of us, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

"Yes," I thought, "I knew her because she had served me, and she knew me because she had served me." And then the vision cleared before my eyes like windshield wipers removing the snow. We will know him when we serve him, and he will know us when we serve him. This question filed my mind: "Can

I one day say with the same conviction with which Sister Dudley spoke, 'I told you he would know me?'

What if I hadn't taken time to do what mattered most, when in the press of the moment it seemed to matter least? I don't do those things enough, but when I do I know it is in the Lord's service that we qualify best to be called his disciples.

Let us keep ever in mind an anticipation of that glorious day when we will be with our Father again. President George Q. Cannon helps us envision that event with these words:

We existed with Him in the family relationship as His children . . .

. . . when we see our Father in heaven we shall know Him; and the recollection that we were once with Him and that He was our Father will come back to us, and we will fall upon His neck, and He will fall upon us, and we will kiss each other. We will know our Mother, also. [Gospel Truth, pp. 1, 3]

We might add, "I told you he would know me."

One day, like Annie, we will leave the stage. And I am confident that having done our part, with arms outstretched, we will receive an embrace and experience the greatest

commendation we could ever hope for from the only one that really matters: "You played your part so very, very well." I believe we will hear our Father and Mother say, "My son, my daughter, I have you home again." Then we will hear not with our ears, but with our spirit, the echoing applause of multitudes of heavenly hosts, our brothers and our sisters, rejoicing in our safe return to have glory added upon our heads forever and ever.

May we find our constant example in that part played by the greatest model in the greatest moment of all time when our Savior spoke these lines,

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. [John 17:3-4]

May the curtain never close until our work is finished. And when it does close, I pray that we will each feel the satisfaction of having listened to the whisperings of the Spirit every day of our lives, that we may prepare to do our part. God bless you, my brothers and sisters, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.