

Thanksgiving

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We have an interesting custom among us in which we set aside special days to think about special things. We set aside the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day, and on this day we let our minds reach up and try and understand the purposes for which this day was set apart. We set apart the third Sunday in June as Father's Day for the same reason.

Someone has said that the human mind has some of the qualities of the tendrils of a climbing vine. It tends to attach itself and draw itself upward by what it is put in contact with.

And then we have some other great days on which we put our minds in contact with other great ideas. We have Easter and Memorial Day and Pioneer Day and Christmas and the Fourth of July.

In the month of November we set aside the fourth Thursday as Thanksgiving. On this day we try to build gratitude and appreciation into our lives. And as we recount our blessings we increase them. Cato, the great Roman philosopher, once said that gratitude is the mother of virtues. That is, virtues have parents the same as people do, and a thankful heart can produce the most profitable posterity. And we might well join with Shakespeare as he prayed, "Oh God who lends me life, lend me a heart replete with thankfulness."

However, we can't adequately think about any of these great ideas if we just think about them during one day of the year. That is, if the only day we commemorated Mother's day was on the second Sunday in May, there wouldn't be much of a Mother's Day. We do a little better with another day that we sometimes refer to as Father's Day. That is, the God of creation himself has set aside the first day of each week as a kind of Heavenly Father's Day in which we let our minds reach up toward God. Someone has said that our civilization would never have survived for a half a century if it had not been for this one day in seven that we call Sunday. This is the Sabbath. This is the day when we try to reach a pinnacle in our lives. This is the day when we pay particular attention to the washing of our bodies; this is the day when we put on our best clothes and read our best books and think our best thoughts. This is the day when we associate with the people that we love the most. This is the day for which we reserve the best meal of the week. Then, after

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we have laid aside the cares that concern us during the other six days, we go to the house of prayer and let our minds reach up and try and understand the purposes of God.

Like the commemoration of Easter and Christmas, the commemoration of Thanksgiving ought to last 365 days in the year. As we approach this Thanksgiving season of 1975, maybe we should do a little homework on the idea by making up a catalog of some of those things that we ought to be thankful for.

Gratitude to God

Of course the greatest fact there is in the universe is God. We ought to be thankful *for* God and we ought to be thankful *to* God. Some thirty-four centuries ago, from the top of Mt. Sinai, God gave the world his law. And in the first of these great commandments God said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Suppose it was your privilege to discharge God. Who would you want to place in his place? How would you like to be ruled by the Democrats, or the Republicans, or the labor unions, or the economists, or the college students? We have a great article of faith in which we say, "We believe in God." That does not mean that we merely believe that he exists, but that we know the kind of being he is and what our relationship to him ought to be.

I am grateful *for* God, that he is my eternal Heavenly Father, that he has endowed me with a set of his attributes and potentialities, and that I might eventually become even as he is. I am grateful *to* God, who is the giver of all good gifts, and I can help to lift myself up to him by running these feelings of appreciation through my life. The psychiatrists tell us that when an idea passes through our minds it makes a kind of groove or engram which determines the kind of people we are. We ought to memorize the great hymns of praise and worship. Thinking about my many blessings, I like to recite to myself the great poem which says:

*Oh God, I thank thee for each sight
Of beauty that thy world doth give
For sunny sky and air and light
Oh God, I thank thee that I live.
That life I consecrate to thee
And ever as the day is born
On wings of joy my soul doth flee
And thank thee for another morn.
Another morn in which to cast
Some silent deed of love abroad
That greatening as it journeys past
May do some earnest work for God.*

I also love to repeat to myself the great masterpiece of Stuart K. Hine's entitled "How Great Thou Art":

*O Lord My God! When I in awesome wonder—
Consider all the world Thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed.
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee—
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!*

*When through the woods and forest glades I
wander,
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze.
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee—
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!*

*And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in,
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin:
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee—
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!*

*When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God how great Thou Art!*

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee—

*How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee—
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!*

Gratitude for Life

Next, it seems to me that we ought to be grateful for life. Life is that mysterious primal element in which each of us, including God, has his being. God has created a plant life and animal life, but he has given us a very special kind of human life with the possibilities of growing into the kind of life which he himself has. Henry Thoreau, an early American philosopher, once said that we should thank God every day of our lives for the privilege of having been born. And then he went on to speculate on the unique supposition of what it might have been like if we had not been born.

Just suppose that you had never been born, or that your parents had never been born. Just think of all the excitements and benefits that you would have missed as a consequence. However, what Mr. Thoreau may not have known was that one-third of all the children of God never were born and never can be born, because they failed to pass the requirements of their first estate. We remember the unembodied spirits who appeared to Jesus in his day, who preferred the bodies of swine rather than not to have any bodies at all.

I am grateful to my parents and to God for this tremendous opportunity that I have of being born to live under the most favorable conditions that have ever been known in the world. One of the significant characteristics about the moment of birth is that it is an unconscious moment. Nobody realizes that he is being born when that event is actually taking place, and we usually don't find out about it until quite a long time afterward. Sometimes we never actually do find out that we have been born. One man once said about his friend, "He doesn't know that he is alive," and that sometimes comes very near the facts. That is, some people don't know why they are alive,

or where they came from, or where they are going, or what the future condition of their lives will be.

There is another thing that I'm very interested in about my birth, and that is what Jesus had said, that to be born once is not enough and that everyone ought to be born twice. And so on August 27, 1911, I was born again of water and of the spirit in exactly the meaning of that term as indicated by the Savior of the world. I repented of my sins as best I knew how; then I went into the waters of baptism and came forth in the newness of life. I had authorized hands laid upon my head for the reception of the Holy Ghost, and I was confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by my father. In all of the years since then, I have had the privilege of living by those great standards of conduct which the God of heaven has made a part of his church organization upon this earth. What tremendous advantages that has given me in my life here which will go with me throughout all of eternity.

Then I have discovered another interesting thing about being born, and that is that no one is limited to two births. Everyone can be born again as many times as he likes, and each time he can be born better. In 1932 Walter Pitkin wrote a book entitled *Life Begins at Forty*. But that is ridiculous. Life begins every morning. Life begins when we begin. Phillips Brooks was once asked when he was born, and he said, "It was one Sunday afternoon about 3:30, just after I had finished reading a great book."

When we learn a new truth, we are born again. When we get a great conviction stirring in our hearts, we become a new person. If anyone has been wrong, he can be born again, and he can be born to be exactly the kind of person that he, himself, may choose to be.

Gratitude for America

Another thing that I am very grateful for is that I was born an American. I have been

around quite a little bit, and I have seen a lot of other places. There are a lot of wonderful places in the world. But I hope God will excuse me if I am a little bit grateful that I was born an American, that I was born in this great, free land where God raised up wise men to write the Constitution of this land and establish this country upon Christian principles.

We express our appreciation to Christopher Columbus, who in 1492 discovered America, but we might say that from several different points of view Columbus did not discover America. He was trying to find a new route to the East Indies, and until Columbus died he did not know that he had discovered America. In fact, America has not yet been discovered by most of the people in the world—or even by those people who live upon this land.

The first statement ever made about our earth is that it was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And we might feel that brooding, unbroken darkness when God gave that first great command, saying, “Let there be light.” And God looked out upon the earth, which included America, and called it “very good.” But for the first fifty-five hundred years of our earth’s recorded history until the time of Columbus, most people knew nothing about the great drama of earth life which took place in America. Most people do not know that America, the land on which we live, served the world as the cradle of civilization and that the Garden of Eden made up the very central part of what is now the United States of America.

During the flood, the ark was carried to Mt. Ararat and a new cradle of civilization was established in Asia, but at the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel the Lord sent a colony back to establish the great Jaredite civilization, which the Lord himself said would be equal of the great empires of Assyria, Babylon, or Persia.

The world does not yet understand that America is a choice land, choice above all other

lands, that it was selected by God to be the citadel of liberty, and that America has been given the great mission of keeping freedom, righteousness, and human dignity alive in the world. Most people have not discovered that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth in our day and that it was America that was selected to be the religious center, as well as the scientific center and the cultural center of the world, in the greatest and final age of all which the apostle Paul referred to as the dispensation of the fulness of times.

There are many people who have not yet discovered that the keys of their eternal welfare have been restored by God to America. In this coming year we will celebrate the Bicentennial of our nation’s birth. It has been 482 years since Columbus arrived here. He explained why he came by saying, “Our Lord unlocked my mind, sent me upon the sea, and gave me fire for the deed. Those who heard of my enterprise called it foolish, mocked me, and laughed. But who can doubt but that the Holy Ghost inspired me?”

Three hundred thirty-eight years after Columbus, the Father and the Son made a visit to Joseph Smith in the sacred grove in Palmyra, New York. And yet many Americans, and many Latter-day Saints, do not yet understand the blessings of living in this great, free land. It is one of the purposes of the Church during this Bicentennial year to help everyone in the world discover America. And the Church of Jesus Christ, which has been established here, is now proceeding at its most accelerated pace to spread its message throughout the world under the authority of God himself in preparing the world for the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ.

George Washington believed that he was an instrument in the hands of God in the establishment of this great American nation. He said, “The singular interposition of divine providence in our behalf has been such as could scarcely escape the attention of the most

unobserving." And in his inaugural address he said, "Every step by which we have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency."

In the United States with some 6 percent of the world's population and 7 percent of the world's land area, we have approximately 50 percent of all the radios, television sets, automobiles, and food supply of the world. In a material way, there isn't any one of us who does not live better than any king lived just a hundred years ago. There isn't any one of us who would not count it an incredible hardship to live as Solomon lived in all of his glory.

As Joshua was about to proceed to lead his people across the River Jordan to repossess their promised land, which was already in a full state of cultivation, the Lord said to the children of Israel, "And thou shalt inhabit cities which thou didst not build and thou shalt eat from vines which thou hast not planted and thou shalt drink from wells which thou didst not dig" (see Deuteronomy 6:10-12). There isn't any American who does not eat from vines which he did not plant. There isn't any Latter-day Saint who does not drink from wells which he did not dig. There isn't any one of us who does not enjoy a thousand different benefits which he had no part in producing. And then the Lord said to the children of Israel, and he is trying to say to us, "And when thou hast eaten and art full, beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God." There is always great benefit in remembering the source of our blessings.

In his Thanksgiving Day Proclamation of 1863, Abraham Lincoln said, "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown." Then he mentioned our perennial problem when he said, "But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand that preserved us in peace, and

multiplied and enriched and strengthened us. And we have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom or virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God who made us. It behooves us then," said President Lincoln, "to humble ourselves before the offended power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness." And we ought to know the conditions by which our great American blessings are brought about.

In 1831 Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous French historian, was sent to our country in an attempt to help his country discover America. He said, "I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there; in her fertile fields and boundless prairies, and it was not there; in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and her power."

Then he said, "America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great." That is a very important fact which every American, and every Latter-day Saint, needs to discover for himself about America.

Calvin Coolidge told us a great deal about American greatness when he said:

*We do not need more material development,
We need more spiritual development.*

*We do not need more intellectual power,
We need more moral power.*

*We do not need more knowledge,
We need more character.*

*We do not need more government,
We need more culture.*

*We do not need more law,
We need more religion.*

*We do not need more of the things that are seen,
We need more of the things that are unseen.*

Gratitude for Gospel

One of the other blessings that I am very thankful for is my part of the faith of the Saints. One of the great documents of the world is what we call the Articles of Faith. These are thirteen statements of belief, twelve of which begin by saying, "We believe." It is probable that the greatest misfortune of many people is their disbelief in good things. So many people disbelieve in God. They disbelieve in their work. They disbelieve in religion, and they disbelieve in the purpose of life. Someone has said that the ability of people to disbelieve is unbelievable.

On the other hand, what a thrilling, exciting thing it is to be able to say from the depths of one's soul, "I believe in God, I believe in America, I believe in my work, I believe in my family, and I believe in my own eternal destiny."

Suppose we make a list of these important principles of life and salvation which have been with us since before the foundation of the world.

I believe that God has ordained and established the literal bodily resurrection. During the last seventy-three years I have never seen my own spirit, but I have gotten very well acquainted with my body. And while it may not look very exciting to some of you and it is a little bit out of shape in some places, yet I am very grateful for it. I am very grateful for this magnificent brain which God has given each one of us. Mine may not work as well as yours does, but I like it just the same. I like the way it thinks. I like the way it takes orders from me.

I like the ambitions that stir around in my brain once in a while. I enjoy my several appetites and, while my eyes are getting a little weary and some of my other abilities aren't as alert as they have been, yet I'm very grateful for them. And I can't tell you of any more exciting thing that I can think of in the world than to believe in the literal, bodily resurrection, where, with quickened senses, amplified powers of perception, and a vastly increased capacity for understanding and happiness, we will continue throughout eternity.

I am grateful for this marvelous principle of revelation. How discouraging it must be for some of those poor unfortunates who believe that God has retired from business, or that God is dead, or that he has lost interest, or that he will never again speak to his people upon the earth. And what a thrill that I can say, "I believe in all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and I believe that he will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

Here's another great Article of Faith: "I believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel." The Son of God came to the earth to take upon himself our sins, and he suffered for our transgression to the point that he sweat great drops of blood at every pore.

What a thrilling and exciting time, not only to live in this greatest and final of all dispensations, but also to look forward to an eternity of endless progression, of endless association with God, of endless family association, and of endless happiness.

I heartily congratulate you who are attending this great University. I hope you fully recognize and understand the privileges which are presently yours to form great friendships, acquire constructive attitudes, and learn the great truths of life as you are being born again.

The moment of growth, like the moment of birth, is frequently an unconscious moment.

Sometimes we are being educated the most when we are least aware that the process is taking place. And so we come back again to this important procedure of strengthening our gratitude, as we exclaim with Shakespeare, "Oh

God who lends me life, lend me a heart replete with thankfulness." And may God grant that it may be so, I sincerely pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.