

“Peace Like a River”

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A few years ago, a film crew and I climbed into a rented green van at the Boston airport and set off up the coast to trace the unfolding of the Restoration. It was March—cold and blustery with sheets of ice and snow. We started in Topsville, Massachusetts, where Joseph Smith’s ancestors settled and had a pew in the church on the commons. Taking each historic site in sequence, we then drove to Sharon, Vermont, the birthplace of the Prophet Joseph. It was a serene, somewhat isolated setting.

Next we went to Palmyra to that grand stand of trees—the Sacred Grove. I had been there several times. With each visit I felt the spirit of that setting. There, young Joseph Smith spoke to the Father and the Son, face-to-face. And reality changed forever. Church President Joseph F. Smith described it as “the greatest event that has ever occurred in the world, since the resurrection of the Son of God from the tomb and his ascension on high” (GD, 495). Think about it. From that moment Joseph Smith knew more about our Father in Heaven and our Savior, Jesus Christ, than anyone alive.

The Restoration is marked by significant settings like the Sacred Grove that string across America. But it is much more than rebuilt cab-

ins, monuments, and places on a map. Joseph Smith described the Restoration as

a work that God and angels have contemplated with delight for generations past; that fired the souls of the ancient patriarchs and prophets; a work that is destined to bring about the destruction of the powers of darkness, the renovation of the earth, the glory of God, and the salvation of the human family. [HC 4:610]

There is grandeur in the Restoration.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has taught:

The simple truth of the matter is that without the Restoration, the great Plan of Salvation would be forever thwarted . . . and the full blessings of the Atonement . . . would have been lost to almost all of God’s children, past, present and future.

Almost all the work for the living and for the dead falls on the shoulders of the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times. Not Adam’s time, or Noah’s

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time, or Abraham's time . . . nor Peter's or Paul's in the Meridian of Time. Those churches and those efforts ended in disarray and decay, and they ended quickly.

Without the Prophet Joseph Smith, we . . . would be left with fragmented scripture, unrelated doctrine, conflicting opinions, uninspired practices that over time became binding traditions.

This is what existed prior to 1820. ["Quotes by Members of the Twelve During New Mission Presidents Seminar," Church News, 6 July 2002, 13]

As it falls on our shoulders, our responsibility in the Restoration is sobering. We have work and responsibility that is ours alone. And, increasingly, we are standing alone. In my earlier life, I was a news junkie; but I can hardly stand to watch or listen to the rancor today. Crisis management has become a profession; there are few if any happy endings at the movies; television sitcoms herald what is clearly the underbelly of society; power has become a commodity brokered, sold, and abused; and recent studies show that stress is the reason we are fat. I thought it was the brownies I eat for breakfast.

President Harold B. Lee said,

We have been called to difficult tasks in a difficult age. . . . The converging challenges posed by war, urbanization, dilution of doctrine, and domestic decay surely provide for us the modern equivalent of crossing the plains, enduring misunderstanding, establishing a kingdom throughout the world in the midst of adversity. [Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 214]

No war, threat of terror, disappointment, absence of decency, morality, or civility can penetrate the peace promised by the Lord. That peace came with the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The ancient prophet Elisha

understood peace and tumult. When he and his young servant arose early and went forth, "an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15). Can't you just see the servant thinking, *This is not good. Two of us, so many of them?* Elisha responded with calm: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:16). And then he asked that the Lord open the young man's eyes that "he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17). So it is with us. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we gather in wards, stakes, and districts around the world, and we are promised, "My Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up" (D&C 84:88). With testimony of the Lord and His ways come peace.

I learned much more about peace in Harmony, Pennsylvania, during the tour of Church sites I mentioned earlier. I was not particularly interested in going to Harmony. In my mind I had already jumped ahead to Kirtland, Ohio. Kirtland was a happening place: Joseph saw the Lord Jesus Christ standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit in the temple at Kirtland; angels walked on the roof of the temple in the middle of the day.

But first the trip to Harmony. Harmony was a quiet little burg when Joseph Smith lived there and translated the gold plates. Today, it's not even a town. It's name, though, holds great significance, for here it was that heaven and earth came into harmony. A statue stands alone on a grassy plot; no Church missionaries, no visitors' center. It is isolated from the world. There is nothing but the Susquehanna River. When we left the highway in the van, we rumbled down a pot-holed dirt road past the cemetery where Joseph and Emma's infant son is buried, crossed railroad tracks, and stopped

in a marshy field. We got out and walked to a thicket of trees that edged the river.

And then we walked down to the water.

I wasn't prepared for Harmony. In ancient times Moses heard the voice of God from the burning bush: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). The Susquehanna setting is also holy ground. In another dispensation, Saints had stood at the waters of Mormon and were "baptized in the name of the Lord" and felt His Spirit pour out of the heavens upon them (Mosiah 18:10). It was the same for me at that river.

There, the Aaronic Priesthood was conferred by John the Baptist upon his "fellow servants" (D&C 13:1). That priesthood "holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins" (D&C 13:1). Not long after, the Melchizedek Priesthood was restored with the authority to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost, ordain, heal, bless, comfort, and seal for the eternities. Oliver Cowdery referred to that time as "days never to be forgotten" (JS—H 1:71, see footnote).

Today, peace still ripples down the Susquehanna. I felt it—I who had my eyes on Kirtland. And isn't that the way it is? The Lord's ways are not "in the wind" but in the "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11–12). I had been looking for what I thought were the grandstand moments of the Restoration to compete with the grandstand actions of the adversary. Instead, I found "peace . . . like a river" (Isaiah 66:12)—steady, directed, clear, catching and reflecting the light from above.

These words of Isaiah point clearly to our source of peace: "For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace . . . like a river."

The Restoration is all about that peace. It is about knowing that, notwithstanding the anxieties afloat in the world, Jesus Christ, our Savior, suffered and atoned for our sins. He lives. He loves us and He knows us. He has

gone "to prepare a place for [us]" (John 14:2). The holy priesthood of God has been restored to the earth, and we are blessed beyond earthly measure by that authority. We have covenanted to take His name upon us. Many of us have made further covenants in the holy temple, the house of the Lord. With this knowledge comes peace. Jesus Christ said, "My peace I give unto you: not at the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

Peace comes from the Spirit testifying to our spirit, "Happy day! All is well!" ("Come, Come, Ye Saints," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 30). Think of the context of that familiar phrase. The Saints were crossing the plains; they were burying family members and walking on. I can't imagine the challenge. And yet they "[pressed] forward with a steadfastness in Christ" (2 Nephi 31:20). They relied on the words of the Lord: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Why? Because of revealed truth—that He lives.

President Boyd K. Packer described looking at a two-year-old grandson and thinking,

"What kind of a world awaits him?"

. . . Everywhere we go fathers and mothers worry about the future of their children in this very troubled world.

But then a feeling of assurance came over me. My fear of the future faded. ["Do Not Fear," Ensign, May 2004, 77]

Assurance and peace, they are the same.

Still, the adversary is attacking the very heart of God's plan for His and our family. When our prophet, seer, and revelator Gordon B. Hinckley presented the "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" in 1995 at the general Relief Society meeting, he calmed our fears for the family with these prophetic words:

Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to

return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally. . . .

. . . The sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife. . . .

. . . Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness. . . .

The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan.

[*Ensign*, November 1995, 102]

Jesus Christ said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Think about it. Peace comes in having a witness of the Spirit that He, the Lord Jesus Christ has already overcome the world. For us. In knowing that, we know the adversary is fighting a losing battle. This work will march on just as the Susquehanna flows to the ocean.

What gets in the way of our peace? For many of us it is busy lives. We have perfected marathon mothering—the daily race of getting to the finish line, one step in front of the other, grabbing a drink before we pass out, not thinking about our time because we know we are so off pace. So we just plan to run faster and, next time, get running clothes that match the number so we’ll look better. We are all too busy: too busy to “meet together oft” (Moroni 6:5) as the scriptures say; too busy to read the scriptures; too busy to ponder their meaning in our lives and to find the direction, solace, and peace that we so desperately need. President Gordon B. Hinckley has counseled us, “There is a better way than the way of the world. . . . It is so tremendously important that the women of the Church stand strong and immovable for that which is correct and proper under the plan of the Lord. . . . They must begin in their homes” (“Standing Strong and Immovable,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, 10 January 2004 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 20).

Does the Spirit of peace abide in our homes? The Susquehanna River was home to the Lord’s restored peace. We invite the Spirit into our homes by the way we live the Lord’s commandments, by our priorities, and by the way we follow the prophet. He has asked us to hold regular family prayer, to have family time at dinner, to hold family home evening and counsel together, to study the scriptures and the words of our living prophets as a family, to bear testimony to our children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews. We need to help them know that we know that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of the world, that we are accountable to the Lord for our actions, that our Father in Heaven loves us, and that through the mission of our Savior Jesus Christ, we can return to Him. My question is this: How are we doing? What can we do differently so that peace abides in our homes?

We are counseled in the scriptures, “Lift up an ensign of peace” (D&C 105:39). We are that ensign. People watch us and they will be watching more if, as President Spencer Kimball counseled, we are “different—in happy ways” (*My Beloved Sisters* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979], p. 44). They will watch more if we distinguish ourselves by dressing modestly and being examples to our daughters, who also watch our ways. They will watch more if we are treating one another with charity, forgiving and then forgetting, acting with integrity and honor, and living providently. These bring peace.

Peace comes by inspiration. When the Lord said to troubled Oliver Cowdery, “Did I not speak peace to your mind?” (D&C 6:23), He taught us a great lesson. We must learn to hear and feel the language of the Spirit. Then we will know when prayers are answered and when the Spirit is directing us.

A few years ago I was writing about the Prophet Joseph Smith. I did not view myself as the obvious choice for that assignment, as servants of the Lord go. My credentials were more

being “steadfast and immovable” (Mosiah 5:15) than being an expert on the Joseph Smith story. I had to become an expert—on the job. When you think about it, most of our work for the Lord is like that. He calls us to do things so that we can learn how to do them. I gave days and nights for more than two years to study and write about Joseph Smith. It was consuming. I love him as the prophet of the Restoration. I came to understand his single-minded devotion to the cause of Christ, his willingness to give his life for the work of the Lord. I testify to you that he was and is a prophet of God.

I wanted, more than anything, to get the story of his life right—for him. I wanted to tell of his nobility, goodness, devotion to the Savior. I could almost hear him testifying of the work of the Lord. But here’s the rub. When I finished with my writing and watched it move forward to print and screen, there was an ache in my soul. I felt it wasn’t good enough.

Day after day I walked in the cemetery near my home thinking that all those pioneers buried row upon row could somehow help me. (It was an odd place to search for peace.) I struggled with the thoughts that I had let Joseph Smith down. Worse, I had let the Lord down. Yet I had tried so hard. Perhaps some of you identify. You too may have unresolved issues or efforts in your own life. You’ve done all you can do. Your desires are righteous. You’ve put them before the Lord and hoped for resolution.

And there’s the lesson. We seek resolution, saying, “Fix this, Lord,” instead of seeking peace.

To the beleaguered Saints clutching to life in tents and dugouts along the bank of the Mississippi in 1840, the Prophet Joseph Smith said, “I intend to build a temple as great as Solomon did if the Church will back me up.” And then this personal desire: “If I can behold that temple completed . . . I will say, ‘O Lord it is enough. Let thy servant depart in peace.’” (*Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet*

Joseph Smith, comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook [Provo: Brigham Young University, 1980], 418??). It seems a fair request from a man whose whole life was given to the Restoration, who had faced mobs, been tarred and feathered, experienced repeated financial reverses, had friends turn against him, and been unjustly jailed time and again. Would he live to see the temple completed and the power of the priesthood unite families for the eternities? No.

Two years later, in May 1842, with the temple not yet above ground and baptisms for the dead being conducted in the cellar font, Joseph Smith knew the Lord was not going to grant him his worthy wish. Without waiting to complete the temple, he invited nine men into his Red Brick store and gave them the endowment. Over the next two years, nearly sixty men and women received their endowments from the Prophet Joseph. Bathsheba Smith, my third great-grandmother, was one of them. She wrote at the time, “[We felt privileged to be] led and taught . . . by the prophet himself who explained and enlarged wonderfully upon every point” (Diary of Bathsheba Wilson Bigler Smith, in author’s possession). The work of the Restoration would roll on without him. Peace is often spoken in these words: “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

So there I was, walking in the cemetery, weeping as I talked out loud to the Lord, and knowing it was too late for Him to fix the book or documentary. The men mowing the lawns were looking at me. They thought I was talking to myself. They thought I was crazy. And then in this obscure and unlikely setting, a thought came to me. (Isn’t that the language of the Spirit?) It was this: *Joseph Smith wanted more than anything to see the temple completed. He had to give the endowment in the Red Brick Store. It wasn’t the way he wanted it, but it worked. It worked for the Restoration. It worked for Joseph—he did all the Lord asked of him. So had I. “My peace I give unto you” (John 14:27)*

still sounds in my soul. As Joseph Smith rode to Carthage, he turned in his saddle to catch one last glimpse of Nauvoo from up on the bluff, the half finished temple before him, the Mississippi River winding along. Then he rode on to Carthage, “calm as a summer’s morning” (D&C 135:4). Circumstances had not overwhelmed his soul. Peace was his. It can be ours.

Our prophet has asked us to do the very best we can (“Standing Strong and Immovable,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, 10 January 2004 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 21); and the Lord has urged us to “be still and know that I am God” (D&C 101:16). I knew my offering had worked because I had felt it. Faced with the reality of his shortened tenure, Joseph Smith did the very best he could in the unfolding of the Restoration. And it worked.

The Lord has called us to “stand . . . in holy places, and be not moved” (D&C 87:8). The

Restoration has made a mark in places all over the world, through temples, in particular. Elder Dallin H. Oaks “[borrowed] a metaphor from the familiar world of athletic competitions” in describing the latter days. “We do not know when this game will end, and we do not know the final score, but we do know that when the game finally ends, our team wins” (“Preparation for the Second Coming,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 10).

If anyone should be at peace in their souls, it is us. We know the Lord is on our side. He has overcome the world—for us. Not everything in our lives will turn out the way we want it, but if we give place for and honor to the Restoration in our lives, it will work. And we will have peace—flowing from us—like a river. As the Apostle Paul said, “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.