

When the Light Had Departed . . . I Went Home

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This address was given Thursday, April 28, 2005, at the BYU Women's Conference

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My dear brothers and sisters, I am so happy to be here with you today. I feel of your spirits. I don't know specifically what your need is today. I hope, though, that you are here with a certain question or a specific desire, because when you come hungry, you are more likely to be fed. I know that the Holy Ghost is the true teacher. So what you learn today may not be anything that I say, but rather something that the Spirit teaches you in response to your questions and desires. As it says in the Doctrine and Covenants, if I preach by the Spirit and you receive by the Spirit, then we can be "edified and rejoice together" (D&C 50:22).

Last summer I began personally preparing for this year's remembrance and celebration of the "great and marvelous work" of the Restoration. I reread Joseph Smith's history, I read Lucy Mack's history of her son, and I was able to visit historical sites in Palmyra where many of the Restoration events unfolded.

I realized the profound influence Joseph's home life had upon him. After the most glorious vision in this dispensation occurred, the boy Joseph "went home." His mother immediately sensed his contemplative spirit and asked "what the matter was" (Joseph Smith--History 1:20). Joseph knew that his home was a place of trust and acceptance, of safety and refuge.

As I entered that small, humble log home, I felt its holiness. I could envision Joseph leaning on the fireplace pondering his visit from Heavenly Father and His Son. I also went to the upstairs bedroom, shared by six brothers, where the angel Moroni came to Joseph in response to his penitent prayer.

What happened in this home to prepare this young boy to be the prophet of the Restoration? I think that Joseph came already prepared in his heart. He was innately, deeply spiritual; he had a bright mind and a pleasing personality. But in addition to that, he learned much from his parents. They taught him to work hard and to shoulder responsibility, to be obedient and to have faith, to turn to the scriptures and to the Lord in prayer for every need.

They modeled how to live. When Lucy Mack Smith had problems in her life, she went to the scriptures. When her sister Lovina died, Lucy was particularly downhearted. She said, "I did not feel as though life was worth seeking after, and in my reflections I determined to obtain that which was so often spoken of from the pulpit, namely a change of heart. In order to accomplish this, I perused the Bible and prayed incessantly" (*History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 40). Another time she "retired to a grove . . . not far distant and prayed to the Lord" to help her solve a problem.

Little Joseph was only about seven years old when Sophronia, his older sister by about three years, suffered from typhoid fever. After 90 days of illness, the attending doctor said there was no hope for her life. Lucy said, "My husband and I clasped our hands together and fell upon our knees by the bedside and poured our grief and supplications into his ears. . . . Did the Lord hear our petition? He did hear us. And I felt assured that he would answer our prayers" (*History of Joseph Smith*, 69). Later that night Sophronia began breathing freely and continued to heal from that time forward. Joseph witnessed this constant reliance upon the Lord for help and guidance in every situation. He had learned from the faithful examples of his parents this paraphrased message of the 23rd Psalm:

"My Shepherd will supply my need,
Jehovah is His Name;
In pastures fresh He makes me feed,
Beside the living stream" ("My Shepherd Will Supply My Need,").

What is it that made his home or any home a safe haven? And what is lacking in our society to provide such homes? Two contrasting experiences come to my mind, both in third-world countries and conditions. I visited a young woman in a home with very little furniture or space and open sewage running on the premises. Although the girl and her mother were members, they had not come to church for a long time. After some visiting, I asked the young woman what her hopes and dreams were. She hesitated, then she said, "My greatest hope is that my father would not drink." That comment has haunted me. I continue to be far more concerned by her *hopeless* home situation than her *impoverished* one. In a sense she is spiritually homeless.

In contrast to the spirit of that home, my daughter visited a Relief Society woman who lived high on the Altiplano of La Paz, Bolivia. A small group of young adults was taking food to this poor woman, who lived in a one-room shack with her children and grandchildren. The cold air of the high plains whipped through the insecure roof. There was not room to invite these young adults into her humble home, but her smile and her loving spirit welcomed them anyway. She thanked them profusely and then began enumerating God's many blessings to her. Before they left, she asked if they would sing a hymn with her--"Because I Have Been Given Much" (*Hymns*, no. 219). Her so-called home was a spiritual sanctuary.

Making a home a place of refuge has much less to do with temporal arrangements than with the Spirit. I felt this in Joseph Smith's small and humble log home. When we don't have a spiritual retreat where we can find sanctuary, we feel an emotional homelessness much like street homelessness. In an article entitled "Homeless America," Bryce Christensen discusses this issue:

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"For since when did the word *home* signify merely physical shelter, or *homelessness* merely the lack of such shelter? . . . Home [signifies] not only shelter, but also emotional commitment, security, and belonging. Home has connoted not just a necessary roof and warm radiator, but a place sanctified by the abiding ties of wedlock, parenthood, and family obligation; a place demanding sacrifice and devotion, but promised loving care and warm acceptance" ("Homeless America: What the Disappearance of the American Homemaker Really Means," *The Family in America*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Jan. 2003): 1).

In this sense, the young woman I visited was emotionally and spiritually homeless, while the impoverished Relief Society sister was rich in spirit in her little home.

Each of us has a need within us to be loved, accepted, and trusted. We seek a safe place to go where these needs are met. When I speak to young women, I always ask them what their challenges are. Invariably one of the top problems is a feeling of loneliness or a lack of belonging. They have this need to belong. Many feel this isolation in high schools where they are one of the only members of the Church. Also, unfortunately, many others feel it because they do not have a home where they feel nurtured and protected.

Even in the safest of homes, we have moments of eternal longing, of homesickness for our heavenly home. C. S. Lewis said:

"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. . . . If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other hand, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death" (*Mere Christianity*, 120).

Safe homes on earth foster the Spirit by modeling Christlike virtues, thus helping to satisfy those feelings of heavenly homesickness. The family proclamation teaches that "the family is central to the Creator's plan," and "happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ" ("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102).

That statement teaches us precisely what makes a home a sanctuary from the world. It is a home that is founded upon the teachings of Jesus Christ. He must be the rock upon which our foundation is built. As it says in one of my favorite scriptures, in Helaman 5:12:

"And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall."

This scripture suggests that the storms of life are inevitable. It does not say *if* but rather "*when* the devil shall send . . . winds [and] hail [and] storm [to] beat upon you." Joseph Smith faced mighty storms, but his early beginnings in a home that had been built upon the sure foundation of Jesus Christ had taught him whom he could trust.

I know neighbors, friends, and relatives who have had wind and hail beating upon them. I have personally seen in their lives the ravages of abuse, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, depression, divorce, debilitating accidents, death, same-gender attraction, sickness, suicide, stillborn babies, and wayward children. If these, my loved ones, knew how to turn to the Savior for strength and sustenance, they were able to weather the storms, though still not without some hurt and heartache. One friend said to me:

"These last years have been especially difficult ones for us, as you know. We have felt the mighty winds and storms beat against us. I do not know what I would have done without the safe arms of the Savior around us to protect us from being dragged down to the gulfs of misery. I have been grateful over and over for the home that I was raised in, for the principles I was taught by my parents, who probably didn't even realize they were doing so. They were wonderful examples of Christlike people. That safe haven of childhood helped bring 'safety to our home this past year as the storms descended' " (letter in speaker's possession).

Again this is described in a song version of the 23rd Psalm:

"When I walk through the shades of death,
Thy presence is my stay;
One word of thy supporting breath
Drives all my fears away" ("My Shepherd Will Supply My Need").

This friend found profound strength even while facing her trials. Joseph Smith had great fortitude amidst constant persecution. How? They both had learned in their homes to lean on the Savior. Their homes were refuges of righteousness.

Recently I learned of a home that has been ravaged by a great storm. It is obvious that the Christlike faith and characteristics that have been taught by the parents are deeply embedded in the hearts of the children, because they are responding with complete trust and selflessness. The mother writes:

"In August of 2004 our then 18-year-old son, Seth, was injured in a falling accident at a party with friends from the Church and sustained a broken neck and a C5 spinal cord injury, which has left him with limited arm movement and no feeling below his chest area. This has been a life-changing experience for our entire family. Even during his three-month stay in the hospital, my children were actively involved in his care, coming to stay with him so my husband and I could have a break. . . . Since his homecoming they have continued to play a very active role in his daily care. . . . His brothers and sisters are fulfilling a labor of love for their brother that has forged a strong bond between them that I am sure will last through eternity.

"Let me tell you specifically about his younger sisters. Rachel has been involved with Seth's care both at school (he returned to finish his senior year in January) and at home. She leaves her classes early so she can ride home on the bus with him (this is somewhat of a sacrifice for her since she has choir in the last period and she loves to sing with the choir). At home she also helps . . . bathe and dress him and helps with home therapy.

"Liesl helps Seth with eating and . . . face washing and teeth brushing. She gives up her

precious sleep time every morning during the week to help him eat before he goes to school. There are countless other tasks that the girls perform for Seth on a daily basis, but the most impressive thing to me is the incredible moral support they provide for him and their ready willingness to help him. I have never heard them complain about helping him, even when I know they would rather be doing something else. They are truly learning firsthand what it means to bear one another's burdens. . . . I feel it is a great blessing and honor to be their mother. The good news in the story of Seth is the promise that he has received in many priesthood blessings that he will recover and live a normal life. Fortunately, his injury was incomplete, which means that, medically speaking, he has a higher chance of recovery. But we are setting our trust in the Lord in this matter. Seth's faith is especially exemplary to all of us" (letter from Jayne Belle Coyne, March 21, 2005).

This home is a holy sanctuary. It has been built on the foundation of Jesus Christ--the principles He taught, the pattern He modeled. Christ taught selfless service. He taught that we serve one another even when the load seems unfair or unbalanced. He demonstrated pure love, love that never faileth, love that "suffereth long, and is kind, . . . seeketh not her own, . . . beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (Moroni 7:45).

I grew up in such a home. Like Nephi, I was born of goodly parents and was "taught somewhat in all the learning of my father [and mother]," and therefore I came to have a "great knowledge of the goodness . . . of God" (1 Nephi 1:1). Recently my healthy 80-year-old father had a medical emergency. He is doing much better now, but during those days and weeks of uncertainty, I thought a lot about what he and my mother have meant to me through the years. The home they made for my brothers and me, like Joseph Smith's home, was a place of refuge, protection, and sanctuary. Because they verbalized and exemplified their love for and reliance upon the Lord daily, we knew and loved Him too. We felt that climate of trust, mutual respect, and love that armed us to face the inevitable challenges of life.

Early in their marriage, my parents made the temple their model for the kind of home they wanted to establish. To be a holy place where children could feel the Spirit, it needed to be a house of "prayer, . . . fasting, . . . faith, . . . learning, . . . glory, . . . order, a house of God" (D&C 88:119). I remember family prayer twice a day as a happy time--a time when we talked and laughed, shared frustrations and challenges, and then prayed in faith. My father always said, and still does, "Heavenly Father loves us, and things will all work out, but we must do our part." My mother always said, "Be wise and careful about what you pray for, because Heavenly Father will answer your prayers. Look each day for the little miracles in your life."

When my husband and I started our own home, we learned from the homes where we grew up. We remembered working side-by-side with parents in the kitchen, in the garden, and in dad's office. We hiked mountains, did homework, went to general conference, ate breakfast and dinner daily together. We looked to our parent's examples of disciplining strong-willed children and prioritizing busy schedules. In these later years, we marvel at their untiring devotion and sacrifice to serve Heavenly Father, to build His kingdom, all the while continuing to support and love and build unity within the family.

My husband and I are now the parents of young adults who are no longer living at home.

How can we best provide refuge for them in the trials they face or give appropriate love and guidance in decisions they must make? We hope they have built their own foundation upon Jesus Christ and that they will turn to Him when the storms beat upon them. We have tried to teach them faith, which is represented in the words of the hymn "Be Still My Soul": "Thy God doth undertake to guide the future as he has the past" (*Hymns*, no. 124). We know from countless past blessings that we can continue to trust Him in our futures.

Also, the door to our home is always open to our dear children, both figuratively and in actuality. Even Joseph sought comfort in his parents' home in later years. He again returned there during the gloomy period of sin and repentance after Martin Harris had lost the translated manuscript from the gold plates. His parents' home was ever a place of refuge amidst all of life's storms.

I invite each of us to remember and model righteous examples from our growing-up homes. While many of us will have positive reflections, some will need courage, knowledge, and strength to improve upon past situations. As we continue to learn how and diligently strive to make our environments stronger and more spiritual, I know Heavenly Father will bless us in this most important endeavor. President James E. Faust recently taught about the need for righteous homes. He said: "If we really want our homes to be places of holiness, we will try harder to do those things that are conducive to the Spirit of the Lord. . . . May the Lord bless each and all of us in our special responsibility to find holiness to the Lord by standing in holy places. That is where we will find the spiritual protection we need for ourselves and our families" ("Standing in Holy Places," *Ensign*, May 2005, 68).

It is my hope that these righteous refuges that we build on earth--like the homes where my husband and I grew up, like Seth and Rachel and Liesl's home, and like Joseph Smith's home--will prepare us to finally return to our eternal sanctuary. There our eternal longing will be satisfied:

"There would I find a settled rest
While others go and come;
No more a stranger, nor a guest,
But like a child at home" ("My Shepherd Will Supply My Need").

After the glorious First Vision, Joseph Smith "went home." After his participation in the great unfolding of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith again "went home." The same morning that Joseph and Hyrum went to Carthage they had read this passage from Ether in the Book of Mormon:

"And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity.

"And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: If they have not charity it mattereth not unto thee, thou hast been faithful; wherefore, thy garments shall be made clean. And because thou hast seen thy weakness thou shalt be made strong, even unto the sitting down in the place which I have prepared in the mansions of my Father" (Ether 12:36-37).

Once again Joseph "went home"--this time to a "settled rest . . . like a child at home," to

the place prepared for him in the mansions of his Father.

I testify that the family is ordained of God and is central to His plan. I know that we are about Heavenly Father's work as we provide earthly refuge in strong, Spirit-filled homes for His children. May we be diligent, joyful, and unwavering in this endeavor and then ultimately find final refuge, safety, and sanctuary in His mansions above, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.