

“It Is Thy House, a Place of Holiness”

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*Wife, mother; former general president of the Relief Society;
recently released as matron of the Cardston Alberta Temple.*

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I was born of goodly parents, and grandparents, in the shadow of the temple in Cardston, Alberta, Canada. Because the temple was so much a part of our community it is only in retrospect that I've realized how pervasive its influence was. In our small, predominately Latter-day Saint town, people worked hard to survive in their business in town or on the surrounding farms and ranches. No one was rich. The community, I suppose, was ordinary, but the temple made everything grand.

The temple was the landmark of all Southern Alberta.

I roller-skated on the sidewalks around the temple as I grew up. I walked through its well-kept grounds with boyfriends, received my endowment in that sacred building, and was married there. When I left Cardston as a bride, I never dreamed that I would have the opportunity to serve there as matron.

We went back often as a family. I always relished going home, especially when we approached the Canadian border from Montana and all the familiar memories from my youth came back to me. The wind and winters in Cardston were always bitter cold. The story is told that Charles Ora Card, who founded the settlement on the blustery, wind-swept prairie, was walking to church with his son one day. "Isn't the air fresh and invigorating?" he asked.

"Yes," said his son, "and isn't there a lot of it." [1](#)

It is gusty, but I love it. I love how the land gradually flattens out from the Rocky Mountains into a prairie that grows buttercups and shooting stars and buffalo beans and wild roses and yarrow. Canada made me and centered me.

My husband, Joe, and I celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary at the Cardston Temple (and our fifty-first and our fifty-second). Our home those three years was directly across the street. How I loved looking out the window, day or night, winter or summer, at that magnificent granite structure, a unique jewel among all the temples. Each temple in the Church is a sanctuary, as Brigham Young described, "where [God] can lay his head, and not only spend a night or a day, but find a place of peace." [2](#)

Actually, being a temple worker had not been high on my list of things to do, but it should have been, because I learned so much, and I treasured the insight I received from being immersed in the essential ordinances of the temple. Never did I look out the window and think, "I wish I didn't have to go to the temple today." I looked forward to each day of service. I came to appreciate and anticipate the fulfillment of the prophecy given by President Wilford Woodruff: "When the Savior comes, a

thousand years will be devoted to this work of redemption."³

One of my pleasant duties was to instruct sister patrons who were attending the temple for the first time. I tried to impress upon them the additional understanding they would receive from returning often to participate in temple ordinances. I wanted them to feel not only the joy of service, doing for others that which they could not do for themselves, but also the personal closeness to the Savior so readily found in making and receiving temple covenants and ordinances. I knew this would happen when they returned. It happened for me, and I shared that rich blessing with all who came to the temple.

I saw a lot of people go in and out of that temple, and I never saw one drag out saying, "I wish I'd never come today!" Quite the opposite. They left spiritually enriched, uplifted, ready to face what was ahead. These were good people we could count on to join with us often in temple worship and service. Some of our ordinance workers traveled five hours each way to complete their weekly assignments. President Ezra Taft Benson promised, "with increased attendance in the temples of our God you shall receive increased personal revelation to bless your life as you bless those who have died."⁴

I witnessed miracles in the temple—often they were simply the richness of the spirit that these hard-working Canadians took home to their farms and their fields. It was humbling to hear what happened there last month. There has been a drought in southern Alberta for three years. The Saints in all the stakes prayed for moisture, and they received two unusually heavy and wet snowstorms. The normally small Thursday evening session was nearly full after these storms, full of faithful Saints giving thanks for the Lord's blessings.

Elder John A. Widtsoe said of temple worship, "Men grow mighty under the results of temple service; women grow stronger under it; the community increases in power; until the devil has less influence than he ever had before."⁵

And we understand what the Lord promised in the Doctrine and Covenants: "Let the hearts of your brethren rejoice, and let the hearts of all my people rejoice, who have, with their might, built this house to my name. For behold, I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house" (D&C 110:6-7).

The temple transforms our rather ordinary town into something better because of what the members receive when they attend. We too are transformed; we receive joy from service, fortification for difficulties ahead, peace from obedience, promptings in preparation, and emotions of gratitude. It has been so since the Saints sang with joy at the Kirtland Temple dedication.

The first temples of the Church were built during times of physical hardship to prepare the Saints spiritually for what was ahead. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "Inasmuch as you are to be instrumental in this great work, He will endow you with power, wisdom, might, and intelligence, and every qualification necessary; . . . your minds will expand wider and wider, until you can circumscribe the earth and the heavens, reach forth into eternity, and contemplate the mighty acts of Jehovah in all their variety and glory."⁶

I think of how anxious the early Saints were to receive their endowment in the Nauvoo Temple before beginning the trek west. The story is told that Brigham Young was in his wagon ready to leave the city, but when he saw the hundreds of Saints waiting for their endowment, he directed the temple to remain open all night until all those worthy had received their endowment. With this endowment, the Saints had a comprehension of the larger purpose of life, and they were fortified for the journey ahead.

A sister leaving Nauvoo with her family at the time of the great exodus in 1846 wrote: "Many were

the blessings we had received in the House of the Lord which has caused joy and comfort in the midst of all our sorrows and enabled us to have faith in God knowing he would guide us and sustain us in the unknown journey that lay before us."[7](#)

The temple asks us to look further than the life around us. A historian writing of Cache Valley said, "The Logan Temple is the spiritual symbol of the valley. Life is more than a struggle for physical survival or acquisition of worldly wealth. It symbolizes the long-range view of things—an eternal view."[8](#)

The Cardston temple was constructed with that same kind of fortitude and determination. The temple was ten years under construction. My grandfather Anderson was a skilled stone mason from Aberdeen, Scotland. For a number of years, he quarried stone for the Salt Lake Temple in Little Cottonwood Canyon. In 1902 he moved his family to Canada. During the construction of the Cardston temple, he often spoke of "dressing the stone." He knew just how to chisel each carefully chosen piece of granite to enhance the grain of the stone and to ensure it would fit tightly into the appropriate place, able to withstand the wind and storms of that northern climate. And he knew that the temple would stand as a sentinel in a harsh land to reflect the rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ, the perfect Savior for a people seeking eternal life with the Father.

After the temple was completed, my grandparents served as temple workers for as long as I can remember. Said my grandfather of the responsibility, "This is the greatest calling which has come to us, and which we still enjoy, hoping that we may die in the harness and receive a heavenly welcome from our many friends in whose behalf we have labored." Sometimes when I walked those same halls or sat on those same benches, I recognized that the temple for them was more than a magnificent building; it was a symbol of the love of our Lord.

I compare Grandpa's stone work to our preparation for temple worship. Worthiness is critical. We begin with a solid foundation, a testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, and chisel away flint?hard chips of selfishness and doubt. We dress ourselves—just as my grandfather dressed the stone—inwardly and outwardly so that our appearance is consistent with our beliefs. Always remember, sisters, we show respect for the Lord and for ourselves by the way we dress, whether we are in white or in our everyday attire. Our prophets have given clear guidelines on appropriate dress for the temple, at the same time allowing us to make mature decisions. We are instructed in the handbooks of the Church that members who attend the temple should wear clothing that is suitable for entering the house of the Lord. They should avoid wearing casual clothes, sports attire, and ostentatious jewelry.

The entry to the temple in Cardston is dramatic. Behind a reflection pond, an artistic frieze depicts the Savior offering the woman of Samaria living water as he greets her at the well. How appropriate as we enter in at the gate of the temple that we are taught by this lovely scene. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst," Jesus says to the woman. She is confused, and he goes on, "But the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Just as the woman testified "Is not this the Christ" (v. 29), to those she tried to rally to come to Him, our temple worship speaks of our own coming to Christ. In the temple, we hear and feel, "I the Lord am with you, . . . and ye shall bear record of me, even Jesus Christ, . . . that I was, that I am, and that I am to come" (D&C 68:6). Temple worship bears record that Jesus is the Christ.

President Gordon B. Hinckley's tremendous temple-building effort has reminded us of the solemn responsibility to serve in the temple. He said, "In the house of the Lord there is tranquillity. Those who serve here know that they are dealing with matters of eternity. All are dressed in white. Speech is subdued. Thoughts are elevated.

"This is a sanctuary of service. Most of the work done in this sacred house is performed vicariously in behalf of those who have passed beyond the veil of death. I know of no other work to compare

with it. It more nearly approaches the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God in behalf of all mankind than any other work of which I am aware. Thanks is not expected from those who in the world beyond become the beneficiaries of this consecrated service. It is a service of the living in behalf of the dead. It is a service which is of the very essence of selflessness."[9](#)

Prominently placed in the entry of the Cardston temple is a poem inscribed on a brass plaque. The words were penned by Elder Orson F. Whitney, who was serving as an apostle when this first temple outside the United States was under construction:

Hearts must be pure to come within these walls,
Where spreads a feast unknown to festive halls.
Freely partake, for freely God hath given,
And taste the holy joys that tell of heaven.
Here learn of Him who triumphed o'er the grave.
And unto men the keys, the kingdom gave;
Joined here by powers that past and present bind
The living and the dead perfection find.[10](#)

Let's look at this poem for a minute. These holy words set the standard and the feeling for entrance to the holy temple. "Hearts must be pure," the poem begins. And that is the beginning of temple service for each one of us. Our "hearts must be pure," for temple work speaks to the heart. We must prepare to attend the temple; we must honor our covenants; we must live worthy to receive his holy blessings. When we bring hearts that are pure, we are able to feel the power of the Lord's way of learning.

"Here learn of Him who triumphed o'er the grave," the poem continues. Learn of him, Ponder over the experience. Do we rush home from the temple, falling back into the world and its patterns, or do we ponder our experience that we may understand? In 3 Nephi, the resurrected Lord instructs the people who have been with him, "Go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again" (3 Nephi 17:3). That is wise counsel for us today as we return to our homes, having been instructed by the Lord in the temple—for he has told us, "by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38). May we pray to better grasp the covenants we have made; may we gain a greater understanding of the work we have done; may we sustain the spirit of tranquillity so abundant in the temple.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord explains that in the temple we are "endowed with power from on high" (D&C 38:32). The Lord then reveals, "I have a great work laid up in store" (v. 33). That endowment of power allows us to use our talents, gifts, and personal abilities with greater influence and increased intelligence to further the kingdom of God. This I know—we mature spiritually in the temple. I had the great privilege of participating in the rededication of the Cardston temple in 1991. I will always remember the sacredness of that occasion. At the rededication, President Howard W. Hunter, then president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, spoke directly of the power of the temple to change people's lives: "The temple is the place where one takes his bearing on the universe."[11](#) Said Elder Boyd K. Packer, "May we find our way home through the rest of our lives to that home where there will be no parting."[12](#)

This temple is one with a great history that reaches back to 1888 when the fledgling little community of Cardston was struggling to get a foothold on the Canadian prairie. On October 8, a small vanguard of seven Saints led by President Francis M. Lyman, the senior Apostle in the Quorum of the Twelve, joined together "in the sacred service of dedicating that land to the habitation of the Saints."

Nellie Taylor, in attendance with her husband, John, an apostle, recorded what became an

extraordinary event. She described the setting, one that hasn't changed: the "titanic mass of Rockies lined against the curtain of the sky, the grand 'Old Chief' mountain whose summit had not yet been reached by man, towered before [us] as a bulwark of safety more assuring than an army." Impressed to stop the wagon as they reached the top of a hill, "President Lyman directed Apostle John W. Taylor: 'You will please stand at my right, your wife Nellie next, President Charles O. Card at my left, his wife Zina Y. next, Bishop John A. Wolf and his wife (Mary Hyde) facing me,'" wrote Nellie. "Thus was a perfect circle formed by seven men and women. At this point [President Lyman] called upon Apostle John W. Taylor to be mouth in the dedicatory prayer . . . the Spirit was of a Pentecostal nature accompanied by a divine light. Everything seemed hushed as those present listened to the inspirational words of the prayer. Then there came a pause: 'I now speak by the power of prophecy and say that upon this very spot shall be erected a Temple in the name of Israel's God and nations shall come from far and near and praise His high and holy name.'" [13](#) What an honor to have served in that temple!

When I read Revelation 7:15 I think of a year ago Easter. The Lord says in this scripture: "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." We in Cardston decided to celebrate the new millennium by keeping the temple open for two consecutive days and nights for the purpose of performing at least two thousand endowments.

The response from patrons was overwhelming! Wards came from all over the district, coming together, often in fasting and prayer, spiritually united, sharing family research and love. With a small slip of paper in hand, each patron carried home a child of God. And the Lord is aware of that service. In Revelation is found clear assurance: "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first" (Revelation 2:19). To me, this means that when we do our work with charity and faith and patience, the Lord will magnify it.

As each one left the temple following our millennium celebration, he or she took along the motivating power of the sacred ordinances and the sweet peace that comes from doing the will of the Father. It was the perfect beginning to a new century and a new millennium.

We have as our purpose, sisters, to come unto Christ. We come unto Christ in the temple. His spirit is there. The temple ceremony speaks of the importance of each individual as a child of God, of the eternity of the marriage relationship, and of going on to greater glory. It brings comfort and a surety of a better life. I am profoundly moved at the conclusion of each session when I am reminded of the ultimate blessings promised by the Savior. Each is a blessing I fervently seek. Each is a blessing I receive in no other place. The temple is where the Lord brings the greatest measure of peace and hope and understanding and joy.

As I mentioned earlier, the promise given to each temple is contained in Doctrine and Covenants 110:6-7: "Let the hearts of your brethren rejoice, let the hearts of all my people rejoice, who have built this house. . . . I have accepted [it]."

I close with words from the dedicatory prayer of the Cardston temple: "May thy spirit ever dwell in this holy house and rest upon all who shall labor as officers and workers herein, as well as upon all who shall come here to perform ordinances for the living or for the dead. May thy peace ever abide in this holy building, that all who come here may partake of the spirit of peace and of the sweet and heavenly influence that thy Saints have experienced in other temples." [14](#) These petitions are being fulfilled.

I love the temple, and I love the Lord whose work this is. I bear my testimony that He lives, the Son of the Living God, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

[1](#) New Era, 1994, 38.

[2](#) Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 417.

[3](#) Wilford Woodruff, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-86), 19:230.

[4](#) Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants," *Ensign*, May 1987, 85.

[5](#) John A. Widtsoe, "Temple Worship," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 12 (April 1931): 51.

[6](#) Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., 2d ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 4:129.

[7](#) Autobiography of Sarah Pea Rich, BYU Library, Provo, Utah; see also Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Journey to Zion: Voices from the Mormon Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 177-79; spelling standardized.

[8](#) Ricks, *History of a Valley*, 282.

[9](#) *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 635.

[10](#) Orson F. Whitney, as cited in Harold B. Lee, *Decisions for Successful Living* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 138.

[11](#) "Temples like 'No Other Places in World,'" *LDS Church News*, 29 June 1991, 10.

[12](#) Ibid.

[13](#) Nellie T. Taylor, "Prophetic Gift Made Manifest," in N. B. Lundwall, *Temples of the Most High* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993), 165.

[14](#) Lundwall, *Temples of the Most High*, 167.

