

When I Became a Woman, I Put Away Childish Things: Learning to Be Articulate As Well As Righteous

Carole Mikita

*News coanchor and arts and religion reporter for KSL-TV;
t raveled through Europe with the Tabernacle Choir and
to Spain for the dedication of the Madrid Temple;
writer, producer; wife, mother*

© 2000 Carole Mikita. All rights reserved.

In Palmyra, the day began with weather best described as bleak. Some nearby communities had heavy rain showers, others sleet. Add to that cold temperatures and wind, and you had a typical, upstate New York, not-quite spring. But President and Sister Hinckley were among the early arrivals, and as they entered the temple, the weather began to settle a little, and gradually the clouds started to thin. As one seasoned newspaper journalist said, "Well, the President must be here. Just wait, by the time he comes outside in that white suit he wears, the clouds will part and the sun will shine."

The rest of us chuckled, not really lacking in faith, but rather, we thought, understanding that the prophet had many more things to do than worry about the weather. But sure enough, through the doors and past the choir he came, and there came also the sun, shining directly on him and all of us present. "It's almost a miracle," he said. "It is a miracle; it's wonderful." Was he merely speaking of the weather or perhaps the fact that we were witnesses to a completed circle: a temple about to be dedicated as a House of the Lord, in Palmyra, where it all began.

Down the hill and across the street, sits a tiny log home. Joseph Smith used to call it home. It is where he learned from an angel of his role in the restoration of the gospel. Before that, he had prayed to know the truth and wandered into a grove of nearby trees to pray. He received an answer; he saw a vision . . . both the Father and the Son. But it would be decades after the Church was established and its few members pushed out that any would return to settle in this tiny community, not welcomed but determined to stay.

Now there was joy and celebration and a white, marble building to stand as long as the earth exists as a testament to the Lord and one man's faith and courage that had brought us all there.

Light and knowledge . . . let your light so shine . . . we all seek after it daily. But what we

should really do is acknowledge its existence. We accepted the light of Christ when we were baptized; we possess it; if we are faithful, we can have it with us constantly. That, dear sisters, is what separates us from the world. That is what will make us memorable to others. That is what will enable us to plant the seeds of the gospel in others who will never forget what they have heard or seen or felt as some portion of our light passes also to them. We cannot hope to literally convert everyone, to help him or her into and out of the waters of baptism, but we can be instruments in the hands of the Lord because we are here, on the earth now, each one of us for a reason. Only we as individuals can reach certain people who will recognize us again, who will remember our words when those words are presented again, who will know us in the next life and rejoice at our presence because at the first meeting there was a gift that touched the heart, touched the soul.

Judith Merkle Riley writes in her book, *A Vision of Light*, about a woman in the fourteenth century who feels that the Lord has told her to write a book, just to record her experiences and thoughts as a woman.¹ Three priests angrily reject the idea, appalled that a woman would ask such a thing. "After all," one says, "women do not take part in great deeds nor do they think sublime thoughts." She tells the Voice she's discouraged because she's just had a tongue lashing. The Voice says, "Keep at it, Margaret, I didn't think you were the sort who gave up so easily." And so the story begins. And before the reader knows it, Margaret has led quite the life, touching people at each turn with her light, changing each one forever. And so the Lord calls upon us, his army of women, to spread our influence throughout our homes, our neighborhoods, and our places of business and our communities, and, before you know it, the world, because that's where we are.

And not just this world, but the next. Have you not known that sweet overpowering feeling that comes upon you in the temple—any temple—when the connection is made through the veil? It might be a family member you knew here on earth, it might be one whose history and life you searched diligently for through family records or the genealogy library, or it might simply be a woman who lived a very long time ago in a distant land who waited until you came into a particular House of the Lord and stood up for her. And as you silently bore your testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel, it spoke to her heart, it reached her soul; and then the two of you are connected forever, pondering the joyous meeting you will surely have with someone once unknown, then just a name on a piece of paper, a stranger, and now a newfound friend and sister, whose life will be forever intertwined with yours because you shared your light for but a brief moment in time. Sisters, you have it. Smile and share it. Share the good news.

Who was the first one to receive it? Who was the first one to see the risen Lord? It is recorded in John 20: 11–18.

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,

And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

Do any of us really understand what an exciting time it is to be alive in the world today? How exciting it is to be a woman in the gospel today? How exciting it is to know what we know and watch it unfolding before our eyes?

In order to truly comprehend, we need to know who we are and where we are going. It's true, we are products of our upbringing—our environment, our education—but let's not leave out our inspiration, which for many of us, whether born and raised in the gospel or converts, surely happened at an early age. So it was with me . . .

I brought to my eventual conversion, the simple faith of a child. From my earliest recollections, I knew God lived. Not only that, he was and is my friend. He is the one being in all the world I can talk to about anything—good or bad, ethereal or tragic, glorious or horrifying—in other words, life on earth. I learned this from my parents and a book titled *My Friend God*, by Elaine St. Johns, about a little girl named Kristen with a special friend who she can't see but she feels. She tells him everything, about the seasons and the birds, and He talks back . . . not like we talk, but she always understands when she listens. One day she lost her little red wagon. She looked everywhere, asked everyone, and then she decided she had better talk to her friend.² Then she sat and thought and thought, and suddenly she remembered! Another time she raced out of the house to go ice skating with her brother, but when she tripped and fell, the sharp blade of the skate cut right through her mitten into the palm of her hand. It hurt badly but when she told her mother to pray, her mother was too afraid and distracted. So Kristen prayed. "God, you are my life. You love me. Even if all the blood runs out, you are my life. Even if I went in the Den of Lions with Daniel, you are my life. And I love you." Then the doctor fixed her hand, and when he was finished, he told her mother the cut had been deep but her hand would be fine. It was a miracle. . . . "No," said Kristen, "it was my friend, God." I believed in prayer. I believed He

would always hear and answer, and He always has, every time. I knew who Jesus Christ was and I believed in angels . . . and life after death.

So, when the missionaries came to our door in 1960 when I was nine-years-old, they spoke words that struck a familiar cord. It was as if I had heard them before. It wasn't surprising that my mother heard their message and responded by asking to be baptized. She told me about a book she was reading, *The Book of Mormon*, which came with a promise, that if you read it and prayed for an answer, you would receive one, just as Joseph Smith had.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. (James 1: 5–6).

Well, I looked at that book with my youthful knowledge of reading and instantly determined that it was too long and complicated for me at that age. *Someday*, I thought, *but the Lord would understand. After all, he knows me and my abilities. I'll just explain.* So I talked to my Father in Heaven, apologizing for not reading it, but telling him that I believed He would answer my prayer, a child's simple, straightforward request. And, yes, I received my answer . . . powerful, undeniable. I have never changed my story. As I stand before you today, a convert from Ohio who was not baptized until the age of twenty-one, I tell you sisters I knew of the truthfulness of the gospel at age nine. Do not underestimate the testimony that springs from an innocent believer. I knew it independent of anyone else then, as I do now. I have never feared those who do not like the Church or understand it, but I know that we, as individuals, must be interesting and approachable enough as people for others to want to know us first, and then, in turn, gain information about the gospel. My parents taught me to be nice to people—all people, all the time. I didn't understand that then, and I have not always succeeded in treating everyone well, but I do look at everyone I pass with a smile and a pleasant greeting, whether in the grocery store, walking through a lobby, or in my place of business. Friend or stranger, it doesn't matter, because it never mattered to the Lord Jesus Christ. "Therefore, what manner of men [or women] ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27: 27).

When our Caitlin turned eight, she was so excited to be baptized. Her primary teachers had prepared her well, and our stake held a wonderful introduction evening for all the children who would make that decision within the coming months. She looked on it as a graduation into the gospel, something she really wanted, so naturally, she wanted all of her friends and the neighbors to be there to share it with her. Unbeknownst to me and with the help of her older sister, she made invitations, announcing the big event, and suggesting everyone come to our house afterwards for a party. After all, this was surely something to celebrate, every bit as important as a birthday, and even more so, if you have eternal perspective, as I'd always taught the girls. Those invitations were hand delivered, boldly I might add, to very few members of our ward. After all, as Cate explained, they already knew about baptism. She took them to people of other faiths, armed with a smile and an assurance that they would come. The day arrived and I was very nervous; I did not want her to be disappointed.

I stored up several excuses that I was sure would work. But I didn't have to use them. Shortly after we arrived, the chapel began to fill with members of our ward, family members of the two other children being baptized, and then one by one all of the people Caitlin had invited—her teacher at school, the other carpool mom, her husband and two children, the next door neighbors, and then the ones up the street (the mother and two children in that family are now members of the church)—all of the important people in her daily life. She wanted them to be there. I had the job of speaking about the Holy Spirit, and I remember looking into those faces who were smiling back at me from the pews; they were happy to be there for our daughter. We have the picture of Cate and all of her friends standing around a baptism cake in our home. She had the biggest smile, as if to say, See, Mom, I told you. I thought to myself, *Oh, ye of little faith.*

I have tried to remember that strength of character every time I have been asked a question about the gospel . . . strength and confidence but also that smile and child-like faith. When they are armed with knowledge and the Spirit, our children are beacons of light. Both our daughters have continued to talk of their Church, their faith, with others and have likewise asked, What about your religion or your church?

I remember watching *The Today Show* one morning, more than a little put off by a gentleman who had concluded in his research that parents have little or no affect on their children because children do what they please as soon as they leave the house. Just moments afterwards, our older daughter, Jennifer, came down after dressing for school and said casually, "Oh, Mom, I forgot to tell you. When you were away on your trip [it had been for a week], Cate and I read our scriptures and prayed every morning, just like we always do." "Wonderful," I said. "I'm proud of you and the Lord is, too." Inwardly I was thinking, *Well, the girls have just blown that theory right out of the water.* It was another great day in my life.

It is extremely important that we, as women in the gospel, move forward into the twenty-first century with confidence. We have words of inspiration from our prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. He's excited about it. He has no doubt about the continuing growth of the Church: "Look, the future of this church is assured. . . . There isn't any question in my mind about that. . . . The patterns of the past become the pattern of the future and that will go on. . . . It will increase. . . . There isn't any question at all in my mind about that. The church will grow."³

He knows, and we must as well. It occurred to me recently that this idea of spreading the gospel is not something that we do; it's simply who and what we are. We must live it every day, in every circumstance.

We must be prepared, we must be knowledgeable, and, frankly, we must live with the Spirit to know the opportunities.

A few years ago, my husband, Neil, and I had just completed teaching Gospel Doctrine for four-and-a-half years. It had been a glorious experience. We were mentally prepared for whatever the bishop needed us to do next. Or so we thought, until he said, "I want you two

to be our next activities chairmen." He looked serious but considering we have never gone to any of our ward's activities, how could he be? I left his office in tears. Could I do this? Maybe. Did I want to do this? Definitely not. Neil was his usual stoic self, just shook his head and tried to comfort me. I actually went back the next day and asked our bishop, who, by the way, is our friend still, "Do I look like a social director you?" He laughed and said, "No, you are an arts person. We need someone in tune with that, who will bring a little culture into our ward and reach out to the neighbors, not of our faith, as well. Go forth, do good. We'll call people who will help you, I promise."

This one I really prayed about and came away determined that throughout the year we would do two things in every activity: it would be in some way spiritually uplifting and helpful to others and, yes, it would include nonmembers. And I was also determined about two other things: food, only if absolutely necessary, and we would not spend any church money.

When I was a little girl in the Episcopal Church, my father always made sure that I had a quarter tucked into my white glove for the collection plate. I was very happy to contribute, and then our minister put that plate on the altar with everyone's money. I figured, after we left, the angels came and took it with them back to Heaven for the building up of the Kingdom. I have since learned that this is the Lord's Kingdom on earth, and we need it here. But, when I was in charge of activities, no money for food or decorations.

The bishop kept his word about calling members to our committee. They each one brought some talent that we needed. For every activity we created invitations that all our children helped us deliver to every house within our ward boundaries. The first was a winter fireside, featuring my friend, colleague, and immensely popular television anchor, Dick Nourse. He drew a crowd, and he had lots to say about his life and new-found direction in the Church. He was everything he needed to be . . . and, yes, nonmembers came.

In the spring our ward had signed up to help clean a section of This is the Place State Park in Salt Lake City where a pioneer village was being constructed. When we arrived with tools in hand, those in charge directed us to an outdoor amphitheater. They needed us to clear the hillside to remove branches and debris from the stage area and dirt where the audience sits. We had a great crew and worked quickly, but I just kept asking, *Where are the nonmembers going to come from?* By afternoon, we found out. A wedding party from one of the Greek Orthodox churches in the valley would hold its ceremony there that evening. As they showed up, we introduced ourselves, and helped those men and women set up chairs, a gazebo for their priest and bride and groom, and then we all tossed flower petals on the path where they would walk. It was a very good day with good feelings all around.

Our fall activity was a neighborhood concert. We held auditions and said no to some offers like an Elvis impersonator. This would be a serious musical production with ushers and programs and an intermission. It turned out to be a wonderful evening, and once again, nonmembers shared their talents with us. I hoped that they could feel that our building was a place where they were welcome, no pressure, where they could be comfortable.

And finally, Christmas . . . what would we do? Members of our committee came up with the idea for a giving tree that they had heard about from another ward. We decorated the tree in our building's lobby with paper ornaments which had dollar amounts on them—25 and 50 cents for the children. Ward families would then take whichever ornaments they could match with a donation. We also encouraged members to bring canned goods and wrapped toys, so that we could help with the needs of our stake. Each family was asked to bring a plate of cookies or fruit and a blanket to sit on for our gathering. We had music, sang Christmas carols together, listened to a message from our bishop, and, yes, people of other faiths donated and attended. It was classic pandemonium with children running everywhere and crumbs all over our floor. Clean-up was not nearly as much fun as decorating with donated trees, lights, wreaths, and ribbons; and I went home feeling unsure of what we had accomplished. But the following Monday our stake president called to thank us for what he called an incredible effort. Our bishop's office had been loaded to the ceiling with food and presents. Our ward alone had come up with nearly half the money the stake needed to take care of people, and what's more, the seven little girls who wanted baby dolls for Christmas, but whose families couldn't afford them, would each now receive one.

Sisters, we are a powerful force for good . . . the Lord knows where he needs each of us and will place us there with the help to get the job done and it always turns out that our lives are changed for the better whenever we are engaged in His work.

And from this place they may bear exceedingly great and glorious tidings, in truth, unto the ends o f the earth, that they may know that this is thy work, and that thou hast put forth thy hand, to fulfil that which thou hast spoken by the mouths of the prophets, concerning the last days. (Doctrine & Covenants 109: 23)

On a visit to his homeland of Poland last June, Pope John Paul II told the crowd who had come to hear him speak. "Do not be afraid to be saints. . . . Today's world needs the holiness of Christians who, in the ordinary conditions of family and professional life, take on their proper daily duties . . . in the spirit of love of God and neighbor."[4](#)

I traveled to Jerusalem last September and was witness to a miracle of music with Utah's Millenium Choir and Lex and Peggy de Azevedo's magnificent video titled *Gloria: The Life of Christ*. While there I had the opportunity to observe women of other faiths, going about their daily tasks, but more importantly, worshipping.

The Dome of the Rock Mosque is considered the third most sacred site of Islam in the world. Tens of thousands of Muslims arrive for prayers each Friday, Holy Day, and on their way home, they pick up household and food items at the bazaar near the Jaffa Gate of the ancient walled city.

Closer to the mosque, we saw pilgrims dressed in white. They are from Mecca. We are told white clothing signifies purity, and they must all wash their hands and feet in the fountains outside before entering to signify cleanliness. Our dear guide and friend, Abraham, would often say, "Mormons and Muslims, we are very close." And inside the mosque, with its rich mosaics and gold, is the rock upon which Mohammed is said to have ascended into heaven.

Below that, a private room of worship where this woman bowed to the east, or Mecca, and prayed.

Yes, we felt the Spirit there. Why? Because, like the one woman, they are righteous people, praying sincerely for help, guidance, and forgiveness; they have their families uppermost in their minds. That is what we have in common, that is what we as women in the gospel must understand about other people's faith and, in turn, have them respect ours.

Abraham Abul Elhawa, Mt. of Olives Travel & Taxi Service: "Clean and healthy and we respect it very much and we feel we are very close and I have a very good, dear friend Mormon in Utah . . . and I don't know if he will see me or not but if he will see me, I will tell him that I miss him so much and I still have the offer for him to come and visit and stay in my home."[5](#)

The Western Wall, or Wailing Wall, is a sacred place to those of the Jewish faith. It is all that is left of Herod's Temple, which was destroyed in 70 a.d. The men and women are separated by a curtain. Individually they approach it with reverence. They stop to read scriptures on nearby tables. They pray silently, by chanting or in a rocking motion that helps their concentration. I was there on a Friday. When the sun set it would signal the beginning of the Sabbath. To the Orthodox Jews, all preparations for that twenty-four hour period had to be completed by then—the stores closed, the shopping and meals prepared, and only a single candle in each home for light. Just before dark, the men would actually block the streets, so there would be no traffic to disturb the spiritual songs and thoughts that were to prevail.

Once again . . . a spiritual experience to watch a young Jewish mother, backing away from the wall because of reverence for it, teaching her two young daughters about the sacred nature of this place and why they should honor it. Another righteous woman, obeying the commandments, loving her children and the Lord.

Ina Esther Joost, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra: "I think it's a wonderful idea to join the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, which is the orchestra of the radio of Israel, together with this American Mormon Choir, and to have this meeting towards the Year 2000 and to sing a glory to our God of Israel."[6](#)

Here at home, I was fortunate enough to attend a Seder, the meal in preparation for Passover. The Jewish family, the Winklers, who welcomed us, makes a habit of opening their home not only to family and friends but out-of-town visitors and university students who are not with their loved ones. There were more than sixty of us. Together we sang and prayed and read scriptures, the reason for each food item was explained, and then our hostess, Debra, read us a letter she had recently received which she considered a blessing. She is often asked why her family does this. She told the story of a young man who joined them seven years before that. He was a ski instructor and away from his family for the holiday. He participated like everyone the evening he was there. Just before Seder the following year, Debra received flowers, and during Seder, the phone rang. It was that young man, who asked if she liked the spring bouquet, and then his parents got on the line, crying

and thanking her for sending their son back to them. He had left his family ten years ago, saying he would never return because he did not need to be Jewish anymore . . . but after being with the Winklers, he wanted to go home and remember who he was.

As she read, she cried, so did we all. Is this not what we do? Open our homes and hearts and embrace others, strangers even, because as it says in Isaiah 40:11: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11: 28).

Sisters, remember your light; do not be afraid. Have confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ and in yourself, and try very hard to understand others. Be the best you can everyday to everyone.

You are daughters of a Heavenly Father, from whose presence you were lovingly sent—with a spiritual scrim lowered over your remembrance—but He counseled you to love Him always, as He loves you, with all your heart and might, so that one day you can return to His presence.

"When I was a child, I spake as a child . . . but when I became a [woman]," my spiritual persona became accountable, inspected daily, and hopefully refined (1 Corinthians 13:11). Our womanly days have become a journey of perfection in a very imperfect world where it is so very easy to stumble, lose our way, our spiritual polish.

Let me speak to the importance of image, Ladies, "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Mormon 9:9). How hard it is sometimes to maintain our spiritual equilibrium midst this ever-changing world. But, the answer is as pure and simple as the gospel itself—nothing has changed. The gospel truths are entrenched and will work in the most urbane ways of life and emerge victorious. Our Heavenly Father is as in-the-know as anyone. Remember, He knows our hearts, our trials, our current temptations, our foes, our weaknesses . . . and He is always in touch. How often have you said, "Please send someone to help me"? Or, "Can you make time stand still for awhile today, so I can accomplish what I need to?" Or, "I'll never get through this; grant me the light of the Spirit." He is a concerned parent. He wants us to succeed, to be our best, to return to Him one day in a trail of glory. "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we be ever with the Lord" (Thessalonians 4: 17).

We are the standard bearers, the nurturers, the keepers of the faith. The children watch every move we make, listen to every word we say. The world inspects our behavior. Others find it hard to believe we have raised our bar so high! Have we learned to finesse our way in the world, to be polite and charming but firm? Do not look at yourselves for an instant as an outsider but one who very much belongs in the forefront, a woman with a mission to be true to her mind and her Lord. Your modest dress is classic, as are your mores and personal cleanliness. The radiance of your faces testifies of your inner beauty. It is real. We are in a world that needs our quiet refinement fueled by our faith.

We belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My mother loved to say the name; I do as well; so should you. When you speak, use it. As a woman, you are a teacher. It is incumbent upon us to live our faith in the world, in the most polished way we can. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16).

My dear sisters, wherever you are around the world, I leave you my testimony of this Church, His Church.

How fortunate I am to be a woman in the gospel today. How sure I am that God lives, that he hears and answers every prayer, in His way, in His time, that Jesus Christ is our Savior. He died not only for our sins and transgressions but for every wrong and hurt we have or ever will suffer. And that we can live with the Holy Spirit as our guide, every day.

1. Judith Merkle Riley, *A Vision of Light* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1989).
2. Elaine St. Johns Dare, *My Friend God* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1956).
3. Gordon B. Hinckley.
4. Pope John Paul II.
5. Abraham Abul Elhawa, videotape interview, September 1999, tape in possession of KSL-TV Eyewitness News, Salt Lake City.
6. Ina Esther Joost, videotape interview, September 1999, tape in possession of KSL-TV *Eyewitness News*, Salt Lake City.

