

“Gather All Safely in Christ”

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President Nelson has called upon the women of the Church to assist in the gathering of Heavenly Father’s children on both sides of the veil to Christ, in preparation for His glorious second coming.¹ Every priesthood key, every covenant with its associated priesthood power, every spiritual gift, especially the companionship of the Holy Ghost, and every revelation has prepared, and will yet prepare, every needful thing for this last hour of work in the Lord’s vineyard.¹ How do we, in a time of disruption, change, and challenge, gather all safely in Christ?

We know the answer Jesus gave the lawyer who asked him to name the greatest commandment. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as theyself.”² If all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments, certainly the gathering of scattered Israel does as well.

“Come Follow Me”³ is the Savior’s invitation to walk His covenant path. The first effort in gathering all safely in Christ is to bring ourselves to Him. As we draw near to Him in trust and obedience, we learn to love Him. We love Him when we have enough faith to make sacred covenants with Him. Our love for Him grows as we faithfully make every effort to keep those covenants.

Though we do not fully comprehend how the miracle takes place, we realize that we can only be made clean and whole through His mercy, His grace and His charity. We recognize with sublime gratitude that He binds up our broken hearts and frees us from all things that held us captive. Neither pain, abuse, intolerance, loss, sin, sickness, disappointment, affliction, temptation, nor death are beyond His reach.⁴ Our increasing faith and hope in Him casts out our fear and we are enabled by His power to have a disposition to do good continually.⁵

These uncertain times have taxed our souls. We are separated from others, unable to show the same close affection and care to grandchildren, elderly parents, the ill, friends or neighbors. We face economic difficulties. Our social sacrifices mean we have experienced losses we can't mourn in traditional ways and births and milestones we can't celebrate as we would like. We have taken on even more responsibilities, which have stretched us to the extremes of our elasticity, but not to the end of our faith. I believe the Lord sees our cares and will give us strength as we climb the 2020 version of pioneer Rocky Ridge.

If there are blessings from this pandemic, and I believe there are many blessings, they come because as Paul promised, all things work together for the good of them that love the Lord.⁶ Has home become a holy place as we gratefully worship there? Has renewing our covenants become a more sacred and meaningful experience? Do we pray more frequently and deliberately? Are we learning what is eternally important for us and our loved ones, and beginning to make adjustments in our habits? Has our testimony of His latter-day marvelous work and wonder been lighted or reignited by General Conference? Are we turning to God more because the things that were displacing Him in our lives have lost their allure? Are we looking forward with great anticipation to gathering with each other again? Have we committed to enjoy temple blessings more when temples open again? I join with many of you in bearing testimony that blessings have come in this season of trial and testing. Blessings that are preparing us for a more consecrated effort to gather all in Christ.

Just as relevant is the blessing of receiving the Holy Ghost with new purpose and renewed gratitude. The gift of the Holy Ghost is one of the great necessities in the continuing restoration of all things for the Church and for each of us. The Holy Ghost is a revelator, comforter, guide, and he is a purifier. The power of the Holy Ghost leads us to understand and live the gospel. The Holy Ghost tutors us in how to hear and love the Savior and to become like Him. The Holy Ghost also teaches us, even in these restricted times, how to love our brothers and sisters, our neighbors, people we have never met, and those who may be antagonistic to us, because we love the Lord first.⁷ When we are fully obedient to the first commandment, we cannot help but obey the second.

President Eyring taught that when we feel the influence of the Holy Ghost, we also feel our natures are being changed because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. "The pure love of Christ is a gift we are promised when the Atonement of Jesus Christ has worked in us. . . .And when we feel our desire for people is moving toward being in line with His, that is one of the ways that we can know that we are being purified."⁸ This process makes it possible for us to engage in the work of the gathering with all the power and great glory promised the covenant people of the Lamb.⁹

Joseph Smith taught, "A man filled with the love of God, is not content with blessing his family alone, but ranges through the whole world, anxious to bless the whole human race."¹⁰ Through the gift of Christ's love and His power, and as He labors with us through the companionship of the Holy Ghost, we can follow the Savior's example in gathering others to Him. He was patient and forgiving with those who struggled.¹¹ He welcomed those outside the acceptable social groups of that day.¹² He listened to honest, seeking questions and taught

saving doctrine with kindness.¹³ He had compassion for those who suffered.¹⁴ He reproved with loving gentleness.¹⁵ He gathered the people in the Americas to Him as He allowed them to feel the prints of the nails in His hands and His feet, one by one.¹⁶ We gather people to Christ when we have His image in our countenances; when their faith in Him can take root and grow because they feel His love, mercy and compassion through us.¹⁷ As he explained to Peter, “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”¹⁸

While doing research in Nigeria I visited a destitute home. I didn’t speak their language. The struggles of poverty and illness were written in the lines of the parents’ faces. My colleague said they had last eaten the day before our visit. The father sent a child on an errand. He returned to offer me a warm bottle of Fanta soda on a rusty tray. How could I possibly drink it in front of that hungry family? The father turned away my protest saying it was his tribal duty to provide refreshment for a guest and begged me not to diminish his self-worth and identity by refusing his gift. I took a sip, and then with his permission gave the rest to the children and I sobbed quietly during the rest of the visit.

As we left the home, my beloved colleague told me the mother had said, “I never believed a white woman would visit my house. I also never believed a white woman would cry for me. If a white woman can cry for a black woman, maybe there is some hope in the world.” Now, I know that I’m not the best example of a Christ-like countenance, and I know that crying is not enough if I am going to keep my baptismal promise to bear one another’s burdens and mourn with those who mourn. But she was right, crying for each other is a beginning.

We know that Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden into the lone and dreary world. When I was young, it seemed that artists painted Adam and Eve being cast out to Northern Arizona. I loved my Arizona home and wondered why it was portrayed as the lone and dreary world. I had a great revelation when I saw a painting by Minerva Teichert. Her inspired artistry showed the lone and dreary world for what it really is. It is not a geographic location at all. It is the proud and selfish condition of people’s hearts. The lone and dreary world exists wherever the two great commandments have no influence on the hearts and minds of people.

Christ calls us with love out of the lone and dreary world. He asks us to work with Him to gather others out of the lone and dreary world, this one last time.¹⁹ Let us come to Him, love Him, and labor for Him with heart, mind and strength. May we receive the Holy Ghost who testifies of Christ, and who will show us how to bring the Father’s ransomed children home as Christ does, with love and tenderness.²⁰ In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Footnotes

1. “Sisters Participation in the Gathering of Israel,” October 2018 General Conference
2. Matthew 22:37-39
3. Matthew 4:19, Luke 9:23, 2 Nephi 31:10-21

4. Isaiah 61:1-3, Alma 7:11-12
5. Mosiah 5:12
6. Romans 8:28
7. Moroni 10:5, 3 Nephi 27:20, Ezekiel 36:27, John 14:26-27, DC 8:2, DC 36:2
8. Henry B. Eyring, "Gifts of the Spirit for Hard Times" BYU Speeches, September 10, 2006
Devotional
9. 1 Nephi 14:14
10. Joseph Smith, History of the Church 4:227
11. Matthew 12:1-3, John 7:28-29
12. John 4:1-30, Luke 19:1-10
13. John 3:1-22, John 8:2-11
14. Mark 2:1-12, Mark 5:25-34, Luke 7:11-17
15. Luke 10:38-42, DC 3:1-10, Mark 14:37
16. 3 Nephi 11:14
17. Alma 5:14
18. Luke 22:32
19. Jacob 5:70-75
20. "The Morning Breaks" The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Hymns #1, "He Sent His Son" The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Children's Songbook #34