

Arise and Shine Forth

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Sisters, we greet you from Brigham Young University and welcome those joining us on satellite across the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, and the British Isles. We also extend a greeting to BYU-Hawaii Women's Conference. Aloha!

Last night as I looked across the stadium and saw you stitching, stuffing, sorting, and serving in so many ways, I could hardly contain my excitement. If ever there was "a stadium of fire," it was yesterday afternoon and evening. The spirit of service has ignited our souls.

Beginning last year at Women's Conference and then this year, more than ever you have demonstrated that we are a Relief Society. Look what can be accomplished when we unite in the sisterhood of Relief Society! Just yesterday, ten thousand Relief Society sisters were working together to bless countless lives.

During the course of this year, you-and devoted sisters everywhere-have made quilts and hygiene kits have gone to Kosovo, Turkey, Mexico, Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Venezuela, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Mongolia, and Moldova. You did it. You have found ways within the walls of your own homes and in Home, Family, and Personal Enrichment night to reach people in need around the world.

I had the privilege of looking into the faces of Kosovar refugees, hearing their stories, and witnessing the tremendous humanitarian efforts of the Church. You have no idea how many lives are being touched, how many burdens relieved, because you care enough to serve. How does that make you feel? Isn't it great to know you are saving a life, even while you live half a world away?

And in the process, think of how you have blessed the lives of those close to home. Your families and ward families have caught the fire of service. Less-active members and nonmembers have found a place beside you in serving. Everywhere I go, I hear stories of reactivation and conversion in connection with these service projects. Also, Young Women,

Scouts, and priesthood brethren have united with you.

Sisters, thank you! Mahalo! Gracias! Obradaga! Please know how wonderful you are. The scope of your service is far and wide and deep. It encompasses not only material giving but also service in missionary efforts and family history and the examples you set in your everyday lives. As you turn to our Heavenly Father for guidance, follow the Spirit and serve as directed by the Holy Ghost.

During some of the darkest days of the Church, when the Saints were facing terrible persecution in Far West, Missouri, the Prophet Joseph Smith revealed the will of the Lord for the Saints then and for you and me now: "Arise and shine forth, that thy light may be a standard for the nations" (D&C 115:5). That is the theme of our conference this year and the subject of my remarks today.

"Arise and shine forth." What hope this can give us. The Lord did not wait until the Saints in Missouri enjoyed more peace and prosperity, until they were settled in comfortable homes and friendly neighborhoods. He simply told them, and each of us in turn, to "let your light so shine" (Matthew 5:16).

Even as I say this, some of you may be thinking, You don't understand my situation. I know that many of you carry heavy burdens. Your sorrows, pains, and hardships are real. But with confidence and tender regard, I believe that each of you can "arise and shine forth." Not because I told you so but because our Lord and Savior arose on the third day and through His atoning sacrifice made it possible for each of us to find relief from the pains, sorrows, and limitations of mortality. In Christ's perfect life, each of us can find new life not only in the hereafter but also in the here and now.

At a recent general Relief Society meeting, President Gordon B. Hinckley, our prophet, gave us the charge: "If anyone can change the dismal situation into which we are sliding, it is you. Rise up, O women of Zion, rise to the great challenge which faces you."¹ He spoke to you and to me and to every sister in this great organization. We must rise up and be "a standard for the nations."

Reflect with me for a moment on how Mary Magdalene rose up that first Easter morning. Put yourself in the place of Mary when the Risen Lord visits her outside the empty tomb, and learn from her singular example.

Not three full days had passed since Mary witnessed the crucifixion of her Lord and God. She had "stood by the cross" (John 19:25) and watched the soldiers drive nails into His hands and feet. Mary had every reason to be at home grieving. But where was she on the morning of the third day? While "it was yet dark" (John 20:1), Mary arose and with the other women went to serve their Lord. They brought the "spices which they had prepared" (Luke 24:1) and went to anoint His body. The nature of their service was rather commonplace, a customary and thankless duty performed for the least among them. But it was an act of love, and in the performance of it, Mary would see the face of her risen Lord.

ARISE IN LOVING SERVICE

If we are to be a "standard to the nations," we must arise in loving service. The Relief Society Declaration reminds us that as Relief Society sisters we "delight in service and good works."² If we are to rise up and really serve others, we must understand and embrace the mission of Relief Society. Relief Society sisters are an integral part of our spiritual safety.

When the first twenty Relief Society Sisters gathered in Nauvoo and were deciding on a name for their organization, Eliza R. Snow questioned the word relief because it implied service both common and extraordinary. Emma Smith, the newly set-apart president, liked the idea and said, "We expect extraordinary occasions and pressing calls."³ The Prophet Joseph Smith was requested to be in attendance and he stated, "With the resources [the Relief Society sisters] will have at their command, they will fly to the relief of the stranger; they will pour in oil . . . to the wounded heart of the distressed; they will dry up the tears of the orphan and make the widow's heart to rejoice."⁴

Sisters, we are seeing the fulfillment of this and other prophecies about the Relief Society organization. It was divinely inspired and organized. At the third meeting of the Relief Society, in a cabin about the size of your living room, the Prophet Joseph Smith said, "This society shall have power to command queens in their midst. . . . Queens of the earth shall come and pay their respects to this society. They shall come with their millions and shall contribute of their abundance for the relief of the poor. If you will be pure, nothing can hinder."⁵

Sisters, as the tide of selfishness sends its waves so high in the world, we can determine to change that tide by being pure vessels of Christlike love and service. Service is the essence of Christ's gospel. Service is the antidote to the ills of our time. Service heals the wounded heart. President Hinckley made this observation: "Generally speaking, the most miserable people I know are those who are obsessed with themselves, the happiest people I know are those who lose themselves in the service of others. . . ."

". . . The most effective medicine for the sickness of self-pity is to lose ourselves in the service of others."⁶ In the first chapter of Alma, we read how the people become righteous and prosperous: "And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need" (Alma 1:30).

No matter what your circumstances, "charity never faileth." This Relief Society motto and the new Relief Society Declaration are not just samplers that we hang on our walls; they must be inscribed in our hearts and become a way of life for us. Everything we do can be performed in a spirit of selfless love and service. Whether we are cleaning the house, shopping for groceries, talking with a friend, or visiting and teaching, we can be

charitable.

One of the service captains who helped you with the service project yesterday probably did not tell you how service has been a vital part of her healing process. Let me tell you her story. Not long ago, Sister Sherry Allen was diagnosed with breast cancer. Because she is a wife and the mother of several small children, this would be no small trial in and of itself. But she had recently adopted three foster children-each only one year old-and her seven-year-old daughter was diagnosed with a brain tumor shortly thereafter. Sister Allen, soon after her recovery, was called to the stake Relief Society presidency. She and her stake Relief Society president, Sister Nancy Howe, fasted and prayed often. They determined that they would stop focusing on their own troubles and reach out to help others. You see, Sister Howe's teenage son had been in a terrible accident that left him paralyzed from the neck down and on an oxygen vent. This faithful son really wanted to complete an Eagle project, so he began making arrangements to fund a large-scale service project for their Relief Society.

Their success was spectacular, and many in the community became involved. Though they were going through deep trials in their personal lives, these Relief Society Sisters and this young man were determined to arise and shine forth. The service they rendered is worthwhile and impressive, but don't think you have to do exactly what they did. The circumstances of each of us are unique, and each of us has her own gifts to give. You do what you can do. Don't "run faster than [you have] strength" (Mosiah 4:27). The Spirit will guide you in your efforts, and you will remember that "all these things are done in wisdom and order" (Mosiah 4:27). Relief Society sisters all around the world are serving in so many different ways. Let me highlight just a few. The sisters in Ukraine assist in making quilts for a local orphanage. Sisters in Austria assist the blind by making teaching kits and skill books for blind children.

Relief Society members in England have an ongoing project of collecting food items for a homeless shelter. Sisters in South Africa gather supplies and make hand-knitted sweaters for sick children. And in the Philippines, sisters help train women in their community to sew, bake, and make dolls. Sisters in a Greeley, Colorado, stake are involved in literacy classes. The stake Relief Society president writes: "We began about eighteen months ago and are completing our fifth twelve-week session. Over fifty women have participated; more than half of them are nonmembers." ⁷ Special enrichment classes for the Spanish-speaking sisters are being held. The list goes on and on.

Loving service takes on so many different forms. Some of the most important services we ever perform are sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and otherwise relieving spiritual suffering. The "casseroles" of faith and hope that we give to a friend, the "cookies" of kindness that we extend to our own families, the "coats" of charity that we gently place on others' shoulders when their hearts need spiritual warming-these are some of the most vital services. And many are performed within the walls of our own homes.

Whether as visiting teachers, member missionaries, family historians, or loving and

devoted mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters, each of us needs to bring others to Christ.

ARISE AND BRING OTHERS WITH YOU

The second suggestion I'd like to make this morning is, When you arise, bring others with you. Notice that Mary Magdalene didn't go to the Garden Tomb alone. Remember that "Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women" (Luke 24:10) came with Mary to the sepulchre. Some of these women were probably members of her family; others were close friends. Perhaps some were those whom Mary had introduced to the Savior and brought unto Him. May each of us reach out and feel the joy of bringing someone to the Savior.

Just like Mary, none of us walks the path that leads to the Savior without helping others along the way. "If any man [or woman] among you be strong in the Spirit, let him take with him him that is weak, that he may be edified in all meekness, that he may become strong also" (D&C 84:106).

When we are truly converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ, we reach out to others and help them find their way back to God, all of which secures our own grip on the iron rod. I have found that whenever we help someone else toward righteousness, our own faith is strengthened.

Sisters, are you actively seeking opportunities to share the gospel with your nonmember friends? When was the last time you bore your testimony to someone, including your family? Do your children and grandchildren know what you believe, how you came to believe as you do, and why your faith and testimony in Jesus Christ are central to your life?

The faithful mothers of Helaman's stripling warriors didn't just kind of think it was true or mostly believe—they knew it, and so must we! One of the most important things we can do as Relief Society sisters is strengthen ourselves spiritually and come to know that Jesus is the Christ, this is His kingdom on earth, and we are His servants. I'm not saying such a knowledge will keep us from heartaches and hardships, but I can assure you that it will carry you through.

President Joseph F. Smith often explained that the reason his mother, Mary Fielding Smith, and his Aunt Emmeline B. Wells were able to remain so strong in the face of adversity was because of their strong testimonies. He said: "Could you turn one of these women away from their convictions in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? No, never in the world could you do it. Why? Because they knew it. God revealed it to them, and they understood it, and no power on earth could turn them from what they knew to be that truth. Death was nothing to them. Hardship was nothing. . . . All they felt and knew and desired was the triumph of the kingdom of God and the truth that the Lord had given to them.

"My soul, where are these women now?"1

I believe we can be such women. I know we can.

ARISE AND SEEK THE LORD

My third suggestion today is to arise and seek the Lord. Mary Magdalene began to seek for Jesus long before she found the empty tomb. Her life had been one of following after Him, listening and learning, believing and doing. He was her personal Redeemer, her Lord and Master. So when the resurrected Lord called her by name, she recognized His voice, "turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master" (John 20:16).

I believe that one of the ways we come to know the Master and hear his voice is by reading the scriptures. Whether you read two chapters or ten, one verse or twenty, when you read the scriptures every day, you open the windows of heaven. Those verses and thoughts stay with you and enlighten your perspective. They strengthen, protect, and inspire you-and your families.

Recently, I learned of a Book of Mormon reading program that some Relief Society sisters in Pennsylvania completed. Each of the sisters made a personal commitment to read the Book of Mormon in forty days. They had an outpouring of the Spirit. They were blessed with missionary experiences, service opportunities, family togetherness, reactivation, and stronger testimonies simply because they immersed themselves in the scriptures.

As Relief Society sisters, we "increase our testimonies of Jesus Christ through prayer and scripture study."² Sisters, take your scriptures to the meetings. Use the scriptures in your lessons. Read them in your families. If we are to be a "standard for the nations," we must "[feast] upon the word of Christ" (2 Nephi 31:20).

ARISE AND BE A LIGHT

My fourth and final point is to arise and be a light, a standard to the nations. The Lord's words of comfort to Mary are for each of us as well. He simply said, "Woman, why weepst thou? whom seekest thou?" (John 20:15). All of her sorrows would be assuaged by the recognition of Him as her Savior. And so will each of ours.

Once Mary Magdalene recognized the Lord and conversed with Him, she "came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her" (John 20:18). In like manner, when we have felt His light and recognized His influence in our lives, we want to share that light with others.

Sometimes I think we forget what a glorious light is ours as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Just this month, a national magazine did a feature article on a Latter-day Saint family with great artistic ability.³ The photographers and writers spent three days with the Al and Nancy Young family, took more than eight hundred pictures, and ended up reporting at least as much about their family life as their artwork. The article featured the Youngs' interest in family history, food storage, and the activities they do

together. It showed their daughter tracing the footsteps of her ancestors on a world globe.

Two quotations from the Doctrine and Covenants were included in the article. And one of Brother Young's lithographs was of a young woman named Charity, a woman whose basket is always filled with service and kindness.

Perhaps most interesting is the response this family is receiving from people all over the world. One of reader commented that the Young's values apply to everyone.

Sisters, the world needs what the gospel gives us. Don't put your light "under a bushel." "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:15-16)

I was recently impressed with an article from the Northhampton Stake in England: "Mormon Mum Makes Headlines."⁴ The public affairs director set out to cover the organization of the Relief Society. A telephone interview with a mother of six included discussions on the family, morality, and religious beliefs and was followed by a visit to the family by a press photographer. The article ended up reflecting the importance of Relief Society in this sister's life and her emphasis on service. The article sparked an interest in how Latter-day Saints live, and local members have enjoyed missionary moments with friends and acquaintances who wanted to know more about this sister and the family-centered life the Church encourages.

In word, deed, thought, and song, the light we emanate truly can be a "standard for the nations" (D&C 115:5). I'll never forget when my husband and I traveled with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir to the Holy Land. The choir sang what was in our hearts when we gathered at the Garden Tomb. And that is my testimony today:

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my
God; All the vain things that charm
me most, I sacrifice them to His
blood.

Were the whole realm of nature
mine, That were a present far too
small; Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

5

If we give our all, everything else will fall into place. Sisters, if we will arise in loving service, bring others with us, and seek the Lord for inspiration and knowledge, we will be a light in this world. "Choose ye this day, to serve the Lord God who made you" (Moses 6:33). We must not fail. We cannot fail.

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Walking in the Light of the Lord," Ensign, November 1998, 99.

2. Relief Society Declaration, *Ensign*, November 1999, 93. "A Record of the Organization, and Proceedings of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo," 17 March 1842,
 3. Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. Hereafter cited as Relief Society Minutes.
 4. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-51), 4:567.
 5. Relief Society Minutes, 28 April 1842; punctuation standardized. See also *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Salt Lake City: Grandin Book, 1991), 117.
 6. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 589-90.
 7. Letter in files of the general Relief Society office. [Sister Smoot: okay to document this way?]
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1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 189 .
 2. Relief Society Declaration, *Ensign*, November 1999, 92.
 3. Colleen Heather Hogan, "For the Youngs of Utah: The Arts of Family Life," *Victoria* 14 (May 2000): 42-44.
 4. "British Isles News," *Ensign*, March 2000,
 5. Isaac Watts, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (Leeds: John Binns, 1790).

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