

The Savior, the Sacrament, and Self-Worth

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Dear sisters of Zion, seen and unseen. We are indeed in the computer age. Our six year old grandson was recently doing his usual heavy reading in *Calvin & Hobbes* and then was called on to pray. He intended to pray for his missionary cousin, Tom, but instead used the word "Hobbes." He paused, didn't know what to do, and then said, "Delete. Delete. Delete."

Let us begin this morning with a legend—the legend of Babette's Feast. Two single sisters make a place in their small Danish home for a woman named Babette, who seeks refuge from war in Paris. Together they live an austere life. One day Babette learns that she has won a prize of ten thousand francs. She ponders, she plans and then spends it all to import boatloads of the finest foods for one lavish feast. The little neighborhood guests gather, not knowing there is a culinary genius in the kitchen. During the dinner she never appears at the table, but remains perspiring in the kitchen, performing with meticulous skill and artistry. A young boy serves as her waiter and follows her instructions to the very letter from turtle soup, to the succulent grapes for dessert. The group savors her meal. Men and women who have been guilty of estrangements begin, impulsively, to revel in mutual forgiveness and fellow feeling. In the spirit of a toast a guest of honor stands. He is a uniformed general. He discourses on the glories of divine mercy, and then says, "This feast reminds me of a woman chef in Paris [she is standing only a few feet away in the kitchen]. She could," he says, and this is the key line, "transform a dinner into a kind of love affair; an affair that made no distinction between bodily appetite and spiritual appetite."

We watched this film years ago in the presence of Elder Jeffrey R. Holland. He has written what for me is one of the clearest and most in-reaching talks ever given on the relationship of souls, symbols and sacraments. He helped me see this story as an elaborate metaphor of what the scriptures call the wedding supper—or the marriage supper—of the Lamb. Jesus, does indeed, liken the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast. He calls the church His bride. And when she is adorned as a bride, He, as the Bridegroom, will come in triumphal reunion. To this consummating feast the poor and the meek of the earth will be

invited. It will be a feast of feasts. All this was envisioned by President John Taylor, who said, "In the sacrament we 'shadow forth the time when He will come again and when we shall meet and eat bread with Him in the kingdom of God'" (*JD* 14:185, March 20, 1870).

Note the Master's sacramental promise in 3 Nephi: "He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul, and his soul [which we know is both spirit and body] shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled" (3 Nephi 20:8). The phrase "they were filled" is absent from accounts of the Lord's Supper, but is present here. As Elder George Q. Cannon observes, "It seems from this that in partaking of this ordinance they satisfied their appetites, that is, they ate and drank until they were filled" (*GQC Gospel Truth*, Vol. 2, SLC, Deseret Book, 1974, p. 159). Yes, and in that moment they were likewise filled with the Spirit and they did cry out with one voice and give glory to Jesus. (3 Nephi 20:9).

We, almost alone, have been taught in the Christian world, that when spirit and body are inseparably connected they may receive a fullness of joy. But in this world, both body and spirit may be famished.

Now, join me at the Last Supper room in Jerusalem. Standing here with Ann and me, amidst the hollow echoes of ancient limestone walls is Elder David B. Haight, and his wife, Ruby. People have said to me occasionally, "Elder Haight must have a great relationship with his wife." "How do you know?" I ask. "Because every third sentence he says 'Ruby and I.'" We noticed that.

This man, shortly before, after a heart attack, had been clinging to life, unconscious in a hospital, and was given a repeated dream-vision of Jesus' last week on earth. Now, gratefully, we listened to him and he spoke in a way that left us breathless. He said what he had said in General Conference: "I heard no voices but was conscious of being in a Holy Presence and atmosphere. The first scene was of the Savior and his apostles in the upper chamber on the eve of betrayal. Following the Passover supper he instructed and prepared the sacrament for his dearest friends as a remembrance of his coming sacrifice. It was so impressively portrayed to me—the overwhelming love of the Savior for each. I witnessed his thoughtful concern for significant details: the washing of the dusty feet of each apostle; his breaking and blessing of the loaf of dark bread and blessing of the wine; and then his dreadful disclosure that one would betray him. Then followed the Savior's solemn discourse when he said to the eleven: 'These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.'" (*Conference Report*, October 1989).

Then Elder Haight turned to me and said, "We do not appreciate the sacrament enough. It happened! It is real! It is our access to the Savior." And we could read the same message in Ruby's eyes. One does not forget such a moment nor the resolve to search deeper.

Now, as if to seal these impressions in me, another privilege came some time later. Now we are in a Solemn Assembly in the Salt Lake Temple. Elder David B. Haight is

officiating at the sacrament table. Ninety years of age, his eyesight is weak so he's obviously memorized the prayer on the water. After the phrase regarding "blood which was shed for them," and the phrase, "that they may have his Spirit to be with them," he paused. Those of us with heads down said to ourselves, "Surely he knows the next word. It is Amen." But he is not hurried. This is the man who has taught that every word in the sacrament prayers is vital. So after a heavy pause, he then adds a word with apostolic dignity: "Always. Amen." I look up to see the face of the presiding apostle, President Gordon B. Hinckley, and he smiles through his tears.

If we do not come to the sacrament table with such inspired recognition, why not? Sometimes, because, as Elder Marvin J. Ashton once put it, "we take it upon ourselves to pass self-judgment and simply declare, 'I am not worthy.'" (*Conference Report*, April 1989). And in some extreme cases, that is true, in which case there is no way back except through repentance through Christ.

But in many more of us, something else may be amiss. We often consider ourselves more or less worthless and in some moods, even beyond help, and we approach the sacrament hesitantly and superficially. But worse still. We do not trust the good news. We do not trust the glad tidings. We do not trust the second opinion of the only Physician who will ever finally judge. This is the Christ. This is He who pleads with us to come boldly to the throne of Grace. He has called himself the Spirit of Truth and that spirit which he has received in fullness brings knowledge, we are taught, of things past, present, and future. Therefore, He, a Seer who transcends all seers, knows our past and our future, and whatever our present soul sicknesses, He knows who we were in the premortal spheres and he does envision our future—what we are to become in the resurrection. In contrast to that, we live in the blur of amnesia about our past and we're subject to fits of doubt and disbelief about our real potential. But hear these words of Elder George Q. Cannon: "Now," he says, "this is the truth. We humble people, we who feel ourselves sometimes so worthless—so good for nothing. We are not so worthless as we think. There is not one of us but what God's love has been expended upon. There is not one of us that He has not cared for and caressed. There is not one of us that He has not desired to save and that he has not devised means to save. There is not one of us that He has not given his angels charge concerning. We may be insignificant and contemptible in our own eyes, and even in the eyes of others, but the truth remains that we are children of God and He has actually given his angels charge concerning us and they watch over us and have us in their keeping." (*Gospel Truth*, comp. Jerreld L. Newquist, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1974, 1:2.)

Sisters, in His sacrament, the Lord gives us glimpses of ourselves. And in self-examination we are most blessed when we see ourselves as we are seen by Him and know ourselves as we are known by Him, then, knowledge of the Savior and self-knowledge increase together. In this world, we do not really grasp who we are until we know whose we are. And week after week the Master invites us to take upon us His name so that we will never forget whose we are. We are His. Isaiah asks, "Can a woman forget her nursing child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" Sadly, the answer is: yes. She may forget. But the Lord says, "I will not forget you. I have graven you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:15). He will never forget us nor our real identity. It is in this spirit that

President Harold B. Lee said again and again, "Begin now to show an increased self-respect and reverence for the temple of God: your human body wherein dwells a heavenly spirit" (Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places*, p.15). Over and over he repeated: "Be loyal to the royal within you." President David O. McKay used to say to his teenage daughters and granddaughters, not "What an awkward thing you are!" but, "What a queen you are becoming!"

It is a truism among us that when we attend sacrament meeting we renew our covenants. And that is sobering enough. As President McKay said: "Who can measure the responsibility of such a covenant—how far-reaching, how comprehensive? [Listen to his list.] It excludes from our life profanity, vulgarity, idleness, enmity, jealousy, drunkenness, dishonesty, hatred, selfishness and every form of vice. It obligates us to sobriety, industry, kindness, to the performance of every duty of church and state, to respect our fellow men, to honor the priesthood, to pay tithes and offerings and to consecrate our lives to the service of humanity" (David O. McKay, *Millennial Star* 85:778).

No wonder we sometimes shrink. A little voice may say, "I'd rather not do that. I'm not sure I can carry it through." But this is the very nub of our stumbling block. Until we covenant, which is more than a casual New Year's Resolution, He cannot bless us to keep our covenants. Without exception, the Lord appends a divine blessing to every covenant we make, guarantees a response from on high, and gives a promise and blessing. In the church our duties expand into privileges, and our privileges expand into higher duties. The most inclusive attendant blessing of the sacrament is His Spirit. And His Spirit, like He, himself, is not sent into the world to condemn the world, but to lift us. He is not committed to putting us down. The gifts and the fruits of the Spirit engulf all our deepest needs, whatever our present desires: insight, flashes of guidance, energy, all the virtues that center in Christ, and through them, all the fire that purifies our feelings and our aspirations. Yes, we come to the sacrament to renew covenants but we also come to be renewed—to be renewed with a divine infusion and then we increase in our strength to honor our covenants with Him and with each other.

Why do we think we can do it alone? And why do we turn our back on Him when we need him most?

Sisters, when the priest kneels at the sacrament table he is told in the scripture to kneel "with the church" (D&C 20:76). That can mean "in the presence of" but it can also mean that all of us kneel with him, and in spirit, we all can. When we do so, the Savior yearns for us to understand that He is kneeling and when He kneels, he offers a prayer, which is in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and which may be the essence of what He said when he knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane. "Behold [as if He is speaking, as he is, to the Father,] the sufferings and death of him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before Him, saying, Behold the blood of thy Son, which was shed; the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified. Wherefore, Father, spare these, my brethren, that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life" (D&C 45:3–5).

If souls are of value in direct proportion to the concern and sacrifice of our Redeemer, then we know that in the eyes of the Father and the Son, your soul—even yours—and mine—even mine—is of infinite worth. Who of us really wants to deny that or to throw it away?

But where does the Spirit come from that heals and redeems? I suggest to you that the residues of divine light are already locked within us; our glory-laden spirits are covered with the lamp shade of the body. But they are still directly subject, we are taught, to the light and life of God, "as if," Joseph Smith wrote, "we had no bodies at all" (*TPJS* p. 355). I take literally the sayings of the Savior, that this light, which is in us from birth, cannot be extinguished, no matter how we neglect or abuse it. He says, "I am the light that shineth in darkness, and the darkness cannot swallow it up" (John 1:5. The Greek suggests "cannot lessen or diminish it"). The full-bodied flame is His, and when that flame meets the flame within us, as two candles blend, so the light becomes one and this is the process by which old things pass away and all things become new.

Sometimes, when I am interviewing young people for a temple recommend or renewal, I hand them a card on which is written this statement:

"Being born again comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances." (*TPJS* p. 162)

"Have you ever seen that before?" I ask.

Very few have.

"Do you know where it comes from?"

"No."

"It comes from the Prophet Joseph Smith in instructions to the Twelve before they went to England. Do you know what it means?"

"I'm not sure."

Then I say something like this:

"It means, as I understand it, that the fullest flow of the Spirit of God comes to us through His appointed channels or ordinances. The sacrament is the central and oft-repeated ordinance that transmits that power to us. Indeed, it is the ordinance that gives focus to all other ordinances." And this is what President McKay meant, I believe, when he said he loved the phrase of Peter: "We may be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Eventually, through a lifetime, His spirit can sanctify the very elements of our bodies until we become capable of celestial resurrection.

In baptism we are born once—born of the water and of the spirit. In the sacrament we are reborn, over and over, of the bread and of the wine or water and we are truly what we

eat. But, not all at once. Can we eat one meal that will last us a lifetime? Some of us occasionally try. Do we not need daily nourishment? In fact, the phrase in the Lord's prayer, the model prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11) may mean "Give us today a foretaste of the meal we will eat with you when you return to us."

We need it oft, and thus on the Sabbath, we gather together, having been told, that we are to be together, that our communication may become communion. And though we come from every degree on the emotional compass, each of us is more or less empty and more or less in need.

Sisters, we have a faith in unity and the Prophet Joseph Smith makes it clear [and this in a remark to the Relief Society] that it is by "union of feeling [that] we obtain power with God" (Relief Society Minutes, June 9, 1842, *Church Archives*; cf. *TPJS*, p. 91). We may have different beliefs and temperaments and backgrounds, but we can all feel one when we are taking the sacrament together. Indeed, it is by union of feeling that we obtain power.

In that spirit, may I read to you something else that has changed me. There is a repeated statement of the Lord that there is one condition we must bring in order to fully participate in the sacramental meal. It is in His revelation on the Sabbath: "Thou shalt offer a sacrifice unto the Lord, thy God, in righteousness, even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (D&C 59:8).

Now, what is a broken heart? In common parlance it usually means, at one level at least, that a hope has been thwarted or a hope blasted or romantic love has been met with apathy. That's as if something outside of us has broken our heart. But, clearly the Lord is saying we can bring a broken heart to Him. And broken now does not mean distressed or tormented, it means an open heart. It means, as one of our brethren has taught us, a heart that is susceptible to the spirit and willing to keep his covenants. A broken heart is an open heart and He can fill it.

The full reach of a broken heart is this: that we put ourselves on the altar. A saying flourished among the ancients: "Only he who brings himself to the Lord as an offering may be called man" (See Leviticus 1:2).

The one thing that can most prevent that openness and that sacrifice is unforgiveness. We, all of us, need—and often refuse to give—three kinds of forgiveness. We sometimes cannot forgive ourselves. We sometimes bear a catalog of grievances against others that still binds us, and, dare I say it, we sometimes are in need of forgiving even God and his Son, for there are resentments in us for such things as His calendar which never quite corresponds to ours. We pray and we know when we want an answer, but the Lord's timetable and our watches are not always synchronized.

After such forgiveness, can come the flow of which I speak.

As I have pondered the seeming contradiction between the Lord's justice and the Lord's mercy, it has come clear to me that when we bring such a heart to Him, then it is

perfectly just that He should have mercy on us, for such a heart is now willing to change, and to honor His will and to draw closer to Him, and then the outpouring follows. He, I also believe, can justly and mercifully ask for our hearts thus, because He gave us his whole heart and because He put himself on the altar. He chose to be humble and indeed, chose even to be humiliated.

There is, in Chaim Potok's novel, *The Chosen*, a final line which is his version of the great Parable of the Prodigal Son. A person leaves home, rejects, rebels, and finally says to a friend,

"I can't go back."

The friend says, "Go back. You must go back."

He replies, "I cannot."

And then the friend says, "Go back as far as you can, and he will come the rest of the way."

Yes, that is divine grace and yes, that is what Christ holds for us.

Can we imagine all of this? When I say "all of this" I'm thinking of Gethsemane and Golgotha. I thought I could. I have lived with Ann in the Holy Land for a total of five years, but recently I was totally taken in a movie studio crowded with actors and staff doing what? Preparing a film that will replace "Legacy" in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building; a film that focuses on the life of Christ and upon his coming as a resurrected being to the Nephite multitude. The scene we were watching was the attempt that they had prayed about that morning. A convert to the church only thirty years of age, named Thomas, was trying to simulate the moment, the moment most significant in eternity when Jesus is nailed to the cross. We watched from a short distance and on a monitor that framed the scene. We saw them force him down on the transverse beam. We saw them stretch his arm. We saw the placing of the spike and of a huge mallet. Then the camera focused in on the profile of his face and when we heard the horrifying "thwack" and the repeat of the mallet, his face and body twisted in contortion. "Cut!" says the director and they readjust the lights and they spray his body with red paint to simulate lines of scourging and cuts in his forehead. And then again. And then again. After the fifth take, he sat up and was compulsively weeping. The director, first concerned and then really anxious, reached over and said, "Are you all right?" He couldn't answer, but finally said, "Sometimes it is so real . . . so real."

Sisters, our scriptures combined with ancient scripture, are absolutely clear on this, as surely as Christ was secured to his cross, we must be secured to Him and if we are commanded (and we are) to take up our own cross, then the witness of Moroni clarifies that. It is that we are to deny ourselves of all ungodliness (Moroni 10). But beyond that denial, which He exemplifies, there is great joy.

We cannot make it alone. We cannot make it without his encircling arms. We cannot

make it any more than He could in the Garden of Gethsemane, without help. For He, even He, praying more earnestly, according to Luke, was visited by an angel who came strengthening Him (Luke 22:43–44). To the Nephite multitude, Christ did not say, "Think of me once in a while, and my spirit will be with you." He said the sacrament would be "a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me, ye shall have my spirit to be with you" (3 Nephi 18:17). There is that word again: always.

After my first mission I asked my father several times, "Is there anyone in our history, in the whole history of man, who has had the Spirit of the Lord with him always?" He thought hard and then said, "Some have come pretty close." If so, then it was through Christ.

It is possible to have Christ in our undergirding consciousness, if you will, at the bottom of our heart, even if something else is, at the moment, at the top of our mind. And that is, I believe, the meaning of the words Sister Kapp quoted this morning. He says, "Look unto me in every thought." Then, knowing that we tend to shrink and say, "Oh, not these thoughts. These are unworthy thoughts." He says, "Doubt not. Fear not" (D&C 6:36).

The Savior has power to change us even when circumstances remain the same. Indeed, He promises this, even in the midst of soul-searing afflictions. Here, for example, are women in the Lehi colony, struggling, wading through sands mile after mile each day. They are forbidden to build fires, so instead of providing cooked meat, the Lord promises He will make wild and raw meat taste sweet. These are expectant mothers. These are nursing mothers. These are aged mothers (1 Nephi 17:2). How would it be to awake in the morning and have your husband say, "What would you like for breakfast this morning dear?" "Oh, I'd like some sweet raw meat, thank you."

Here were people, men and women, enslaved by viscous taskmasters who were commissioned to kill them if they were found praying. Instead of the Lord delivering them He said, "I will ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that ye even cannot feel them upon your backs even while you are in bondage and this will I do that ye will stand as witnesses for me hereafter and that ye may know of a surety that I the Lord, God, do visit my people in their afflictions" (Mosiah 24:13–14).

Here are the three sons of Mosiah away from their families, charged with an impossible mission, namely, to teach and convert people who have sworn eternal hatred to them and have murdered their friends. Instead of compromising the task, the Lord says according to the record, "Be comforted." I have marveled at this. All it says is: "the Lord did visit them with His Spirit and said unto them: Be comforted. And they were comforted" (Alma 17:10). No explanations. No attempt to talk them out of their feelings. Can it be so? Alma eventually sums it up that, though they waded through afflictions of every kind, yet, those afflictions were "swallowed up in the joy of Christ" (Alma 31:38).

He said, as we return again to the Last Supper room, "Be of good cheer" (John 16:33). Can it be that in tribulation, which He promises, he can say, "Be of good cheer" and

we are of good cheer? The only thing to cheer about is our relationship with Him. Yes. And in the very depths and fibers of our being it can be so. And I testify that may be His mightiest miracle. Someday we may even say to Him, "Master, through all my life and my prayers most of the time all you really changed was me." And he will smile and say, "Ah, yes. And what a glorious change."

I close with an entry in my journal. It was in Amman, Jordan some years ago. We had just come from a parched visit to Egypt where even the native Bedouin can survive, at most, three hours without water. We had said to some of our friends, "This should remind you of the two words spoken from the cross, the only self-regarding words which are a sure sign of the loss of blood. Jesus said: 'I thirst'" (John 19:28).

That night I had a dream. I was beaten down to my hands and knees and was conscious of a burning thirst. In the illogic of dreams there was somehow a small cup filled with liquid—an unearthly liquid. It was radiant. It was delicious. It was cool. But as I lifted it to my lips it was as if two hands were placed behind me, not touching, but close to my head, and from them came a kind of throb, a comfort, a warm feeling, and then the miracle. As I drank in relief, the cup filled again and again. The more I sought to quench my thirst, the more it flowed. A wave of gratitude came over me to the Christ—for in the dream it was Christ. My impulse was to turn around, stop drinking, and thank him. But then came the sweet assurance that my drinking was His thanks—that this was what He most wanted—that this was His reward, even his glory, like a gracious hostess, who takes delight in seeing her family and guests eat heartily. I knew and I knew He knew, so I drank and drank until I was full. Only then was He gone.

Sometime later, these words in the *Doctrine and Covenants* leaped off the page: "For unto him that receiveth, it shall be given more abundantly, even power" (D&C 71:6). And elsewhere these words, "Yea, even more abundantly, which abundance is multiplied unto them through the manifestations of the Spirit" (D&C 70:13).

Sisters, I grew up in a single-parent home: a father and two brothers. My mother was gone when I was two. I have no memory. And I had no sister. So what I am about to say I have learned from a queenly wife and from daughters and daughters-in-law. My wife has written a poem which we give to our grandsons when they become old enough for the Aaronic priesthood. Before I quote that, let me say that it is for us a joy to behold and participate with them. She titled it: "The Sacrament Prayer."

The words are repeated once again
this sacred Sabbath time;
words I can trace
through the week,
but this time unique,
spoken,
quietly,
in youthful intonation
and the nourishment

is proffered me
by a boy's hand
in exchange for my changing.

You faithful sisters, married or unmarried, who move daily (and hardly with a break) from the garden plot to the crucial minutia of food labels to the cups and measures of cookery; you, who struggle and preside in the kitchen and keep vigil; you, who reach out to the perennial needs of your family and loved ones; you, who with artistry gather flowers and turn an ordinary table into an altar that summons prayer and thanksgiving; you, who by your very presence, turn eating into a feast--into dining in the name of the Lord, and who, therefore, bring a bountiful measure of grace to your table, lend your faith to boys and sometimes inept men who officiate at the sacrament table. Let the tables turn on your serving. Lend your faith to our trying to act as you do in Christlike dignity. For this is as close as we may ever come to your divine calling to give and to nurture life itself.

Come to a foretaste of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

I can bear witness with a cloud of witnesses that in the midst of affliction, yes, even and especially in the midst of affliction, his table is spread and that with blessings unmeasured, His cup runneth oer. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.